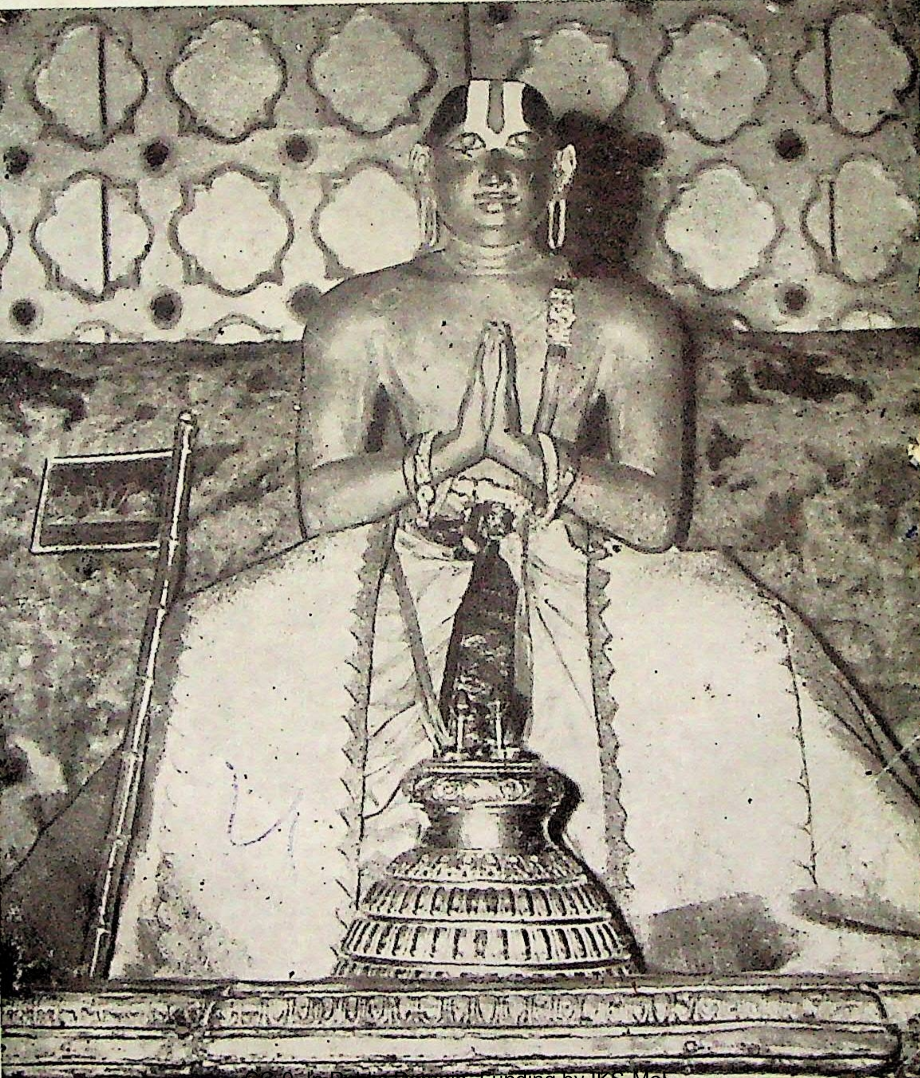
RAMANUJACHARYA

R. PARTHASARATHY



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NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

922.94
PAR

First Edition 1969 (*Saka* 1890)
First Reprint 1979 (*Saka* 1901)
Second Reprint 1991 (*Saka* 1913)
© R. Parthasarathy, 1969
Rs. 8.00
Published by the Director, National Book Trust, India,
A–5 Green Park, New Delhi–110 016

I

RAMANUJA was born in the Tamil region and as such was a spiritual heir to the rich tradition of the great Alvars. An Alvar literally means 'one who dives deep'. The Alvars delved deep into the ocean of divinity and longed for a continuous converse with God. A study of the life of Ramanuja is incomplete without understanding the lives of the Alvars and their philosophy. In fact, it gives us the background for understanding the evolution of Ramanuja as an exponent of a creed that laid stress on *bhakti*.

During the first seven centuries after Christ, non-Vedic religions like Buddhism and Jainism penetrated into the Tamil country. They attacked the excessive rituals and the caste system of the Vedic faith. Carried away by the novelty of the new order, the Kings patronised them and it became evident that the Vedic culture would gradually become extinct. It was at this time that the Alvars appeared on the scene. They realised that if religion had to reach the people, the message must be put across through a local and popular medium. Transcending the barrier of the sacred Sanskrit language, they sang extensively in Tamil, blending philosophy with devotion. The Vedic religion was rehabilitated and the kings came back into its fold; the non-Vedic faith soon lost its hold on the people.

The Alvars were twelve in number. They were born in different castes and were held in great esteem because of their simple devotion and vast learning. One of them was a woman, another an untouchable and some were non-brahmins.

Even one of the brahmin Alvars was a person of dubious parentage. Their religious fervour transcended the boundaries of caste and convention mainly because of their exemplary lives and noble teachings. In fact, the Alvars initiated the *bhakti* cult in India.

The importance of the Alvar movement is that it was an emotional approach to God. For its followers, loving surrender to God's Will is the only way to reach Him. He is beyond even the comprehension of the Vedas, but easily accessible to one who needs Him. They preached that God's grace is not for the esoteric few who do meditations but is also for those who surrender to Him in an unconditional manner. This teaching afforded consolation and salvation even to the most depressed and fallen among mankind.

Traditional accounts claim that the Alvars lived 5000 years ago but Prof. S. Vayyapuri Pillai, a noted Tamil scholar, has assigned them to the period between the 7th and the 9th centuries A.D.

* * *

Poygai, Putattar and Pey are the first three Alvars. Their origin is traced to the flowers, the golden lotus, *Kurukkatti*, and the red lotus. Kanchi was the birth place of Poygai, Mahabalipuram of Putattar and Mylapore (Madras) of Pey.

They went from temple to temple, worshipping God. There is an interesting traditional story current about them. Once it rained heavily and Poygai took shelter in the small room of a house in Tiruk-koil-ur. The place was very narrow and Poygai stretched himself there as he felt extremely tired. A little later, Putattar entered the room and found a person lying down there. He said politely that if there was enough space for one to lie down, two could sit. Poygai got up and accommodated Putattar. Soon after, the third Alvar came and remarked that if two could sit, three might be able to stand. Poygai and Putattar got up immediately and the three were standing in the darkness without knowing one another. At that moment, they felt squeezed by a fourth person who was invisible. Realisation suddenly dawned on them that God was there and they began to sing in divine ecstasy.

Poygai lighted 'the fierce-rayed sun' as the 'luminous wick' and saw Him. Putattar had a vision of Him by kindling 'the bright flame of devotion', and Pey with the help of a deeper perception experienced God as grace inseparably united with the person, *i.e.*, the conception of Lakshminarayana.

Tirumalisai, who succeeded this trio, was said to be the son of a rishi called Bhargavi and a divine damsel called Kanakangi. Tradition has it that he was born in a forest and was picked up by a cowherd, who had no children, and was brought up by him. He is considered to have grown up without taking food and is said to have developed great occult powers. Of the many traditional stories relating to him, the following one is particularly interesting:

Once he changed an old woman young and beautiful. The local king fell in love with her and married her. As he found that time could not touch her beauty, he asked her the secret of her eternal youth and was told that it was due to the blessings of Tirumalisai. The king sent word to Kani Kannan, the Alvar's disciple, and asked him to fetch his guru. The disciple told the king that he should himself go to the Alvar instead of sending for him. The king became angry and ordered Kani Kannan to sing a song praising him.

The disciple refused, declaring that his lips would utter praise only of the guru and God. The king banished him from the city, and the Alvar followed his disciple. And as he went, he prayed to the Lord to roll up His mat and to accompany him. The Lord granted the prayer and followed the Alvar out of the city. Soon the people were at His heels, and the whole town was deserted. The king now came to his senses, and understood the power of *bhakti*.

Kulasekara, the next Alvar, was a ruler of Travancore. He was deeply emotional in his *bhakti*. It is said that once as he sat and listened to a *Ramayana* recital and heard of Rama in distress, he was so profoundly affected that he summoned his army for the rescue of the Lord. His devotion to God expressed itself in his love for His devotees. Once his ministers stole the ornaments belonging to the temple and accused the Srivaishnavas of having committed the theft. Kulasekara refused to believe this and to prove their innocence, he inserted his own hand into a pot full of snakes.

Kulasekara's yearning to worship Lord Rama at Srirangam, his devotion to the Lord's devotees, and his surrender to Him through all vicissitudes, one experienced in *Perumal Tirumoli*, which contains some enchanting poetry, is unique in form and content. Kulasekara indentifies himself with Dasaratha, Rama's father, and dwells on the moments of their parting. This father-son relationship between the devotee and God leads to exquiste immediacy.

Tondar-adip-podi, the fifth Alvar, after a brief romantic interlude, was redeemed by the grace of God. He was born in the village Tirumandangudi and, as he grew up, followed the vocation of his ancestors, *i.e.*, tending gardens. He was a bachelor and had taken a vow not to look at women.

During this time, one Devadevi, a bewitching beauty visited his garden, and as she was told that the owner never looked at women, she vowed that she would entice him within six months.

Next day, she went and prostrated herself before him, requesting him to accept her as his disciple. The devotee of Lord Narayana took her into his fold in all innocence and allowed her to tend flowers in the garden.

Months passed. One day there was a heavy downpour. Devadevi, who got drenched outside, was asked by the saint to take shelter inside his hut. He gave his upper cloth to her since her sari had become wet.. At that time his eyes rested on her and he was struck by her irresistible charm. He fell from grace, and he began to neglect his duties.

He spent all his time in Devadevi's house. Eventually, when he had lost all his property, the pauper was turned out of her house. But Lord Ranganatha took pity on him, assumed mortal form and, entering Devadevi's house, presented to her a golden vessel that belonged to the temple as a gift from his erstwhile *bhakta*. Next day, when the golden vessel was reported missing from the temple, Devadevi's house was searched, as her companion had given information to the Chieftain that it was in her house. Devadevi told the Chieftain how she had received it as a gift and her lover was arrested. But Lord Ranganatha appeared to the Chieftain in a dream that night and told him how the vessel had reached Devadevi's house. Tondar-adip-podi and Devadevi were released, and both of them became ardent devotees. He decided to put on his head the dust of the feet of his *bhaktas* and hence he came to be called Tondar-adip-podi (dust of the feet of *bhaktas*). He composed two works called *Tirumalai* (Garland) and *Tirupalliyelucci* (Song at Dawn).

Tiruppan Alvar was born an 'untouchable' and hence was not allowed to enter the temple but he used to pray from the banks of the Kaveri. One day Lokasaranga Muni, the saint-servant who used to carry water from the river to the temple, found the Alvar in a state of trance. To drive away the untouchable obstructing his way, he threw a stone at him and blood flowed from the wound. That night Lord Ranganatha appeared in a dream to Lokasaranga Muni, and bade him carry Tiruppan Alvar on his shoulders to the temple. Next day despite his protests the Alvar was thus taken to the shrine on the shoulders of Lokasaranga Muni. Ramanuja was so impressed with the story of this Alvar that he repeatedly used to prove his point that God's grace was not the exclusive privilege of particular communities.

Tirumangai Alvar was a petty chieftain. He was passionately attached to a Vaishnava girl called Kumudavalli. She said she would marry him if he fed a thousand *bhagavatas* every day for a whole year. When his resources ran dry, he took to robbery to continue the feeding of the *bhagavatas*. Once Lord Vishnu and His spouse Lakshmi, who had come to the forest as a newly-wedded couple, were duly relieved by Tirumangai Alvar of their jewels and other valuables. But the robber found that he could not lift the box containing the booty. As he looked at the strange couple, the truth dawned on him, and from that very moment passion for his paramour became transformed into devotion to the Lord.

Tirumangai was a prolific author and more than a thousand songs stand to his credit. *Tiruvelukurirukhai*, *Siriyatiru-madal*, *Periya-Tiru-madal*, *Periya-Tiru-moli*, *Tirukurun-Tandakam* and *Tiru-Nedun-Tandakam* are exquisitely lyrical and have few parallels in devotional literature.

Vishnu-chitta or Periyalvar was a brahmin belonging to Srivilliputtur. He was a staunch devotee of Lord Krishna but he was not a great scholar. Once he was summoned to the court of the Pandya king to expound the Vedas. He felt diffident but, as commanded by the Lord in a dream, he obeyed the summons and went. The impossible happened, and he realised that he knew the vedas better than anybody else. The Pandya king was pleased and Vishnu-chitta was taken round the streets of the capital on an elephant and he had the vision of the Lord and his consort Lakshmi. This inspired him to compose beautiful hymns, which are famous as Tirupallandu.

Andal was the adopted daughter of Periyalvar, and the only woman Alvar of Srivaishnavism. Her foster-father brought her up in the orthodox fashion. Andal even in her childhood had chosen Lord Krishna as her future husband and, to ensure this union, lived a life of great devotion and spiritual ecstasy. Her father used to take garlands to the temple every day. These she used to wear and with these round her neck she used to stand before the mirror debating with herself whether indeed she did not deserve to be the Lord's consort. Once Vishnu-chitta caught her in this act and reprimanded her. But Lord Krishna is reported to have appeared to him in his dream that night and told him that, in fact, He liked the garlands better for her having worn them. Periyalvar realised the greatness of his daughter. Andal composed two works called *Tirupavai*, perhaps the most thrilling and best known among the hymns of the Alvars,and *Nacciyar Tirumoli*.

Nammalvar or Satakopa is the most outstanding among the twelve Alvars. As soon as he was born, it is said, he went into deep meditation sitting under a tamarind tree, and remained thus for years.

Madhurakavi, a great religious teacher, who was on a pilgrimage in North India, saw from afar an effulgence and followed its direction. He reached at last the source of the radiance and stood in reverence before Nammalvar. Madhurakavi put to him the question, 'If a soul is born of matter, what does it eat and where does it rest?' The answer came: 'That it eats and there it rests.' By 'that' the sage meant and the inquirer understood God, and Madhurakavi recognised the divinity of the master, and he became forthwith his disciple.

The four works of Nammalvar—*Tiruviruttam*, *Tiruvasariyam*, *Tiruvaimoli* and *Periya Tiruvandadi*—are equated by the Srivaishnavites with the four Vedas, *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva*.

Nammalvar's icon is installed in every Vaishnava temple and worshipped. The other Alvars are considered to be partial avataras of this Alvar.

Madhurakavi, who was guided by light and who sought its source and thus chose Nammalvar as his guru, is the last Alvar. This poet of great renown in his *Kunninun Siruttambu* exalts his master Nammalvar.

The hymns of the twelve Alvars called *Nalayiram* (the Four Thousand) and *Divya Prabhanda*, contain the essence of the Upanishads. While the Alvars dived into the depths of divine communion and gave sweet utterance to their experience in soul-stirring lyrics, the Acharyas, who came later systematised and expounded the philosophy deduced from their mystical experience.

Nathamuni, the foremost among the earlier Acharyas, collected the hymns of the Alvars and grouped them into 'four thousand', each 'thousand' to represent a *Veda*.

Nathamuni was born in Mannargudi, Tanjavoor district, in 824 A. D. It is said that about this time the four thousand hymns had become almost extinct. Hearing a decade of Nammalvar's recited by some *bhaktas* from the far

South, he realised the worth of these hymns and knew at once that they must be part of a hidden treasure. In quest of this he went on pilgrimage to all the places where the Alvars were reported to have lived and collected their hymns which, but for his labours, would have been irretrievably lost to the world.

Alavandar, or Yamunacharya, the grandson of Nathamuni, kept the torch of Vaishnavism burning by his vast learning.

II

SRISAILAPURNA, or Periya Tirumalainambi, was one of the fifteen disciples of Alavandar. He lived an austere life at Tirupati, serving humanity and thereby worshipping God. He had two sisters, Kantimati and Sridevi. Kantimati was married to Kesava Somayaji of Sriperumbudur and Sridevi to Kamalanayana Pattar of Malalaimangalam.

Somayaji was the title given to one who had performed 'Somayajna'. Kantimati and Kesava, though married for years, were not blessed with a child.

Kesava, performed 'Putrakamesti Yajna' and Ramanuja was born in 1017 A. D. Periya Tirumalainambi, who came to know of this, came down from the seven hills and reached his sister's house. The uncle observed the halo round the child's head and the characteristics of Lakshmana, the inseparable brother of Sri Rama, and so gave it the name Ramanuja.

To Kantimati's sister Sridevi a child was born soon after and it was named Govinda.

All the Srivaishnavites in Sriperumbudur came and blessed the child Ramanuja. Tirukaccinambi was one among them. Tirukaccinambi, or Kanchipurna, was a great friend of Kesava Somayaji. He was a sincere follower of the Vaishnavite cult, though born in the merchant community that knew only the arithmetic of multiplication. Once when he was asked by his father where he had stored his wealth, he pointed his finger towards heaven and smiled. He lived a life of simplicity in a small hut on the outskirts of Kanchi, devoting all his time to service and spiritual exercises. People in Kanchi held him in great esteem for his self-effacing humility and saintly living.

As soon as Ramanuja was initiated into learning, it was realised that the child was a prodigy and Sriperumbudur was too small a place to quench his thirst for knowledge. He wanted to go to Kanchi and study under Yadava Prakasa.

Ramanuja was married in his sixteenth year to Tanjamma. A month later, Kesava Somayaji suddenly passed away and the family was plunged in grief. Ramanuja consoled himself and was ready to bear the family responsibility. His strength of wisdom and mental composure at such a young age won the admiration of his relatives.

Soon after his father's death, he decided to shift the family residence to Kanchi. With his insatiate passion for learning, he wanted to be always by the side of his master Yadava Prakasa.

Yadava Prakasa was an exponent of Advaita philosophy. He was a profound scholar and brilliant teacher. He attracted students from far and near.

Ramanuja's cousin, Govinda, the son of Sridevi and Kamalanayana Pattar, soon joined him to attend the Vedanta classes conducted by Yadava Prakasa.

However the affection Yadava had for Ramanuja did not last long. The intellectual abstractions in the philosophy of 'non-dualism' as enunciated by Yadava did not satisfy him. He made bold to differ from his master on various occasions.

Once the guru explained that the Taittiriya text 'Satyam. Jnanam, Anantam Brahma' meant 'absolute identity'. Ramanuja immediately refuted this by saying that these were only the attributes of Brahman, and that they could co-exist without mutual contradiction. It was like redness, softness and fragrance co-existing in a flower without contradicting one another. This irritated Yadava considerably and he told Ramanuja plainly that he had the option to leave him if he so desired. The disciple did not argue further but remained silent.

Another day, when Ramanuja was massaging his master's body with oil, the guru began to comment upon the verse 'Tasya yatha kapyasam pundarikameva maksini' (*Chandogya Upanishad*). He said that 'Brahman had eyes which resembled the posteriors of a monkey'. Ramanuja was shocked by this interpretation and tears rolled down his eyes and fell on the thigh of Yadava. The master looked up and asked his pupil why he was weeping. Ramanuja simply said : 'Your explanation is wrong, Sir. What you have said is an unbecoming and low simile.' 'What is the correct interpretation then?' cried Yadava, unable to control his anger. "Sir, 'Kapyasam' means 'blossomed by the sun', 'pundarika' is the lotus So the passage will only mean that the eyes of the Lord are like the lotus which blooms before the morning sun." Yadava flared up remarking, 'If you do not want to accept my teaching, you can leave.' And Ramanuja having spoken his mind, made his departure. The relationship between the teacher and the disciple was never smooth thenceforward.

Yadava honestly believed that Ramanuja would utlimately become the enemy of Advaita and for the preservation of the age-old doctrine, he felt that this up-and-coming presumptuous lad had to be silenced for ever.

Yadava called his other disciples and held consultation with them. They all agreed that Ramanuja might one day start his own school to refute the doctrine of 'non-dualism'. Yadava immediately said: 'Let us all start on a pilgrimage to Varanasi to wash away our sins in the sacred waters of the Ganga. We shall take Ramanuja also. We will do away with this heretic on the way and wash off this sin in the sacred waters of the Bhagirathi. This is necessary for the cause of Advaita.' The disciples gave their consent to this plan and one of them went to induce Ramanuja to go with them for the holy bath in the Ganga.

Ramanuja's cousin Govinda, meanwhile, suspected a conspiracy and decided to go with him to give him a warning at the right time.

The pilgrims reached the Vindhya mountains and stayed there for rest. The lofty grandeur of the ancient mountains was a feast to the aesthetic and moral sense of Ramanuja. Nature as an expression of God's limitless charm moved him to the dizzy heights of religious ecstasy. Unaware of the impending danger, he moved about in the forest like one possessed, holding converse with the intuitive Being.

His cousin Govinda, who has been feeling nervous all this time, brooding upon the doom that was to descend upon young Ramanuja, at last decided to tell him of the conspiracy.

In the small hours of the morning, Ramanuja reached a rivulet and stood spell-bound by the panorama of nature, the green and flowing vegetation, the hills, the chirping of birds and the glorious morning sky. Govinda walked up to him slowly and touched his shoulders. Ramanuja did not expect his cousin at that hour in the morning and when he expressed his surprise, Govinda spoke to him of the conspiracy that had been hatched even as they started from Kanchi. He requested Ramanuja to leave the pilgrim party immediately.

Ramanuja was shocked to hear this. He did not anticipate that his master would go to the extent of planning murder. If Yadava were to succeed in his designs, he would be committing a sin for which there was no salvation—so Ramanuja thought. He decided to leave that place, and by this alone, he could save his guru from committing a sin.

It was by no means an easy task to negotiate the way in the dense forest. It seemed to him that darkness had suddenly enveloped him. But soon there was day-break. A great strength braced him up. Some voice within him said, 'One who has faith in God knows no fear.' He walked on and on.

Yadava, who did not find Ramanuja in the group of disciples, was told that the latter had gone out alone in the deep forest. They called his name aloud and there was no response. Yadava came to the conclusion that Ramanuja must have been killed by some wild animal. He was pleased by this unexpected turn of luck, as he took it for granted that all was over with this troublesome and star disciple.

Ramanuja, who felt that he was walking for hours on end, was suddenly overcome by extreme fatigue. He sat down under a tree out of sheer exhaustion. A little later, he became unconscious.

He woke up with a start. Before him stood a fowler couple looking at him with great concern and affection.

The fowler spoke: 'Have you lost your way, my boy?'

Ramanuja answered in the affirmative.

'Where is your home?', the fowler asked with extreme tenderness in his voice.

'Kanchipuram, in the South', replied Ramanuja.

The fowler looked at his wife and smiled. He said a minute later, 'We are going to Rameswaram. Accompany us, and we will leave you at Kanchi.'

Though the appearance of the dark, tall and red-eyed fowler was forbidding, Ramanuja found that he could not but follow the couple. An hour's walk brought him to the banks of a river.

The fowler levelled an uneven ground and asked Ramanuja to rest there for the night. The couple retired to the other side.

In the midnight Ramanuja heard the fowler's wife tell her husband, 'I feel thirsty'.

The fowler said, 'I think there is a well nearby, but it is not advisable to go now as it is extremely dark. We shall see about it in the morning.'

Ramanuja decided to bring water for the fowler's wife early next morning. Accordingly, he woke up just before dawn and made his way to the well. He brought water and to his dismay he found the couple missing. He searched for them in vain, for nowhere were they to be seen.

But he saw before him the spread of finely-built houses and the temple towers.

Ramanuja realised that he was in Kanchi. But then, who were they, 'the fowler and his wife'? he wondered.

He remembered the line in the *Sri Vishnu Purana* which says:

'Again and again I salute that Brahmanyadeva, Govinda, Krishna who is the doer of good unto the cows and the Brahmanas and the universe at large.'

III

Kantimati did not expect her son would return so soon, and that too all alone. Ramanuja told his mother everything that had happened and asked her to keep the story to herself, as Yadava was his guru and his name should not suffer.

Sridevi, his aunt and Govinda's mother, on hearing the news of his return blessed him. She felt happy that her son had saved his life.

Three months later, Yadava returned to Kanchi and found that Ramanuja had arrived earlier. He had been under the impression that the disciple had been killed by wild animals in the forest. He now began to wonder whether Ramanuja had come to know of the conspiracy.

He sent for Ramanuja and the latter went to him. Yadava was not able to make out whether Ramanuja was offended with him or not. He was smiling as ever. His master expressed his joy on meeting him again and insisted on him to join his group of disciples as before. And he agreed.

Ramanuja was told by one of the members of the pilgrim party that Govinda had stayed back in Kalahasti. He found a 'lingam' while bathing in the river Ganges and from that very moment, he became a staunch Saivite. He installed this 'lingam' in a temple at Kalahasti, and settled down at that place.

As Ramanuja resumed attending Yadava's *Vedanta* classes, trouble began once again. He found he could not agree with his master's interpretation of the *Upanishads* and differed from him openly.

There was a chieftain near Kanchi whose daughter was possessed by a 'Brahmarakshasa.' Yadava was summoned to treat the case. He went to the court along with Ramanuja

He chanted some 'mantras' and the girl's condition became worse. But it is said that when Ramanuja attempted a faith cure, the girl became normal again. Yadava grew jealous of his disciple and, as soon as they returned home, dismissed him.

Ramanuja went to Tirukaccinambi who welcomed him and gladly agreed to teach him. He was asked to draw water every day from a well and carry it to the temple for 'Tirumanjana' (holy bath for the image). Tirukaccinambi firmly believed that the future of Vaishnavism, after Alavandar, would be safe with Ramanuja.

Alavandar had heard of Ramanuja. Once, when Alavandar visited Kanchi, some one had pointed out Ramanuja standing at a distance as a student of Yadava Prakasa. Alavandar recognising in the broad-shouldered youth a born leader of men, prayed to God that Ramanuja should become a torch-bearer of Vaishnavism. The time had now come for that prayer to be fulfilled.

It gladdened the heart of Alavandar at Srirangam to hear that Ramanuja had left Yadava Prakasa and was studying under Tirukaccinambi. He was ageing and knew his end was drawing near. He called his disciples together and spoke to them thus: 'The Lord of the Universe is the life of our life. A *bhakta* is one who has surrendered himself wholly to God. To doubt God shows lack of faith in the Self. The Lord is the substance of our knowledge. We are in Him and He is in us. We have been created to serve, and service to mankind is true spirituality.' After his discourse, he went to the temple, stood there for a while with folded hands and then returned to the math. He prostrated himself before the Srivaishnavites of Srirangam and asked their forgiveness for any wrongs he might have committed. The disciples were moved to tears when Alavandar told them that his end was approaching.

He called his chief disciple Periyanambi (Mahapurna) and asked him to fetch Ramanuja from Kanchi. Periyanambi left Srirangam and arrived in Kanchi. He went to the temple, offered worship to Lord Varadaraja and proceeded to meet Tirukaccinambi and told him the purpose of his visit to Kanchi. Tirukaccinambi assured him that Alavandar could never have chosen a worthier successor

Next day at dawn Periyanambi saw from a distance the towering personality of Ramanuja as he carried water to the temple. Struck by the majesty of his form and gait, Periyanambi sang aloud the 'Stotraratna', the great song composed by Alavandar.

Ramanuja stopped walking; he stood rooted to the ground on hearing this immortal song and, when it ended, walked up to the singer and enquired of him who the composer of the song was. When he was told it was Alavandar, his joy knew no bounds. He had heard Tirukaccinambi speak of him and was eager to see him.

Periyanambi told him that Alavandar lay seriously ill and offered to take him immediately to the bedside of the master.

As they approached Srirangam, they saw a great crowd. Ramanuja enquired the cause and was told that the great sage Alavandar had passed away. Ramanuja could hardly contain his grief. He had come from Kanchi to meet Alavandar; he could see only his body.

The Vaishnavites of Srirangam had assembled there to pay their last homage to Alavandar.

As Ramanuja saw the body, he noticed that three fingers of the right hand were closed. He pointed this out to the disciples of Alavandar, but none of them could offer an explanation for it. All that they could say was that Alavandar's fingers were normal during his life-time. Ramanuja reflected for a moment and suggested that Alavandar could have had some unfulfilled wishes. One of the disciples told him that Alavandar had often wished he could accomplish three things; one, to perpetuate the memory of Vyasa and Parasara; two, to offer a tribute of love to Nammalvar, the great Tamil poet and three, to write a *visistadvaitic* commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*. But Alavandar was able to fulfil none of the wishes during his life time.

Ramanuja took a solemn oath that he would see that all the three wishes were fulfilled.

The funeral rites were over, and Ramanuja returned to Kanchi.

Ramanuja was now bent on writing a commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*. To refute the great Sankara, one must match his scholarship. To this end, he spent all his time in study and meditation.

IV

RAMANUJA approached Tirukaccinambi to explain to him the Truth. The master did so by clearing six doubts that remained in his mind. These important statements were:

(1) 'I' am the ultimate Supreme Truth (*ahameva param tatvam*).

(2) Vision is distinction (*darsanam tha bhedame vace*).

(3) Surrender is the sole means (to reach Me and gain freedom) (*upayesa prapattissyat*).

(4) Thought of Me at the last moment is not compulsory (*antima smriti varjanam*).

(5) *Moksha* is freedom from the body (*deha vasane mokshancha*).
(6) Accept Periyanambi as guru (*Mahapurnam Samasraya*).

Ramanuja rejoiced to hear these 'Six Words' spoken by the Lord through Tirukaccinambi, but he was also a little sad that the great sage of Kanchi was not to continue as his guru. But as he had to seek further guidance from Periyanambi, he was soon on his way to Srirangam to meet the chief disciple of Alavandar.

Meanwhile the congregation of Vaishnavites in Srirangam felt the need for a dynamic leader in succession to Alavandar. They sought Periyanambi's help in this matter and persuaded him to go to Kanchi to fetch Ramanuja, who had been named by Alavandar the recipient of his grace.

Periyanambi, accompanied by his wife, started for Kanchi and reached Madurantakam, where they stopped for a day and worshipped Kodanda Rama.

Ramanuja,who was on his way from Kanchi to Srirangam, arrived at Madurantakam and was thrilled to find Periyanambi stopping at that place. Falling at his feet, he begged to be accepted as his disciple.

Periyanambi embraced him affectionately and took him to the sacred Vakula tree near the temple. He performed all the five sacraments of initiation as laid down in the Pancavatra Agamas and communicated to him the grace of Alavandar ordaining him. Then, he explained the three truths, namely, *Pramana*, *Prameya* and *Pramata*. *Pramana* is the scripture; the *Dvayamantra* is its sum and substance; *Prameya* is God Himself; and *Pramata* is the preceptor who seeks God and knows Him.

After Ramanuja had been initiated into the *Mantraratna* in this manner, he requested his guru and *gurupatni* to accompany him to Kanchi and stay there as his guests. Periyanambi and his wife stayed with Ramanuja at Kanchi for six months.

During this period he taught Ramanuja 3000 out of the 4000 verses which constituted the Dravida scripture and the *Brahma Sutras* of Vyasa.

It was at this time that Ramanuja and his wife Tanjamma bacame estranged and she went back to her parental home. Ramanuja was married at the age of sixteen to Tanjamma and the latter differed from her husband's views almost always.

It is said that on three occasions she disobeyed the wishes of her husband. Once, he invited Tirukaccinambi, a *vaishya* by caste, to his house for a meal. Tanjamma did not like this at all, but she made no overt objection. Ramanuja took his bath, performed his *puja*, and went out to bring the guest home. But Tirukaccinambi had already left for Ramanuja's house which he reached by another route. When he did not find his host at home, he requested the lady of the house to serve him food immediately as he had to reach the temple in time for his turn of service. She did so and after he left pushed away the leaf by means of a stick, cleaned with cow-dung the place he had sat upon and took a purificatory bath herself. When Ramanuja returned, he was shocked to hear from his wife the reason for her second bath.

On another occasion, a hungry Srivaishnava came to their house and Ramanuja asked his wife to serve the poor man some food. She said that there was not a grain in the house. He searched in the kitchen and found food hidden there. This time too he controlled his anger.

Her third lapse led to his renunciation. It happened thus. As narrated earlier, Periyanambi with his wife was staying with Ramanuja who was receiving instruction in the *Sastras* and *Divya Prabhanda*. The master's wife and Tanjamma used to go to a well nearby to fetch water. Over the matter of a pitcher an altercation developed between them and Tanjamma used harsh language. Periyanambi who came to know of this decided to return to Srirangam to avoid further embarrassment for his disciple. When he came home, Ramanuja heard of his master's departure from Kanchi. He then asked his wife to return to her parents and himself turned an ascetic, earning for himself the name Yatiraja.

V

RAMANUJA took orders from Lord Varadaraja Himself. It was then the *Advaita* practice to accept a sannyasin as guru for initiation into the fourth Ashrama. All were surprised to hear that he had become an ascetic at such a young age.

Ramanuja established a math near the temple. People poured in from all directions to see him. He gathered around him a band of enthusiastic disciples. The first to arrive was Dasarathi, his nephew. He was also known as 'Mudaliandan'. Soon he attained profound scholarship in the *Vedas* and *Vedanta*. He accompanied Ramanuja wherever he went.

Kuresa, of the lineage of Harita, was a rich landlord of Kanchi. He became the second disciple of Ramanuja. The story is related thus.

Kuresa, whose house was always accessible to the blind, the lame, and the poor from morning till late in the night, when he met Ramanuja, decided to renounce everything and join the master. He relinquished all his riches, gave them away to the needy and the poor and followed by his wife Andal, was on his way to the Ramanuja math.

It was night and they were going through a thick forest.

The wife who was not used to such on arduous journey became a little nervous and asked her husband whether danger did not lurk in such places. Kuresa said: 'We have nothing with us. Why should we fear?' Andal trembled and whispered, 'I have brought your golden cup. I thought you might need it on the way to drink water.' Kuresa became angry. He cried: 'I had asked you to leave everything behind. What have you done, my dear woman? Give me that cup.' He took the cup and threw it away. He smiled and said, 'There goes your fear.'

Ramanuja sent his pupils to receive Kuresa. Thenceforth he became one of the leading disciples of Ramanuja.

The fame of Ramanuja was spreading far and wide.

Yadava, the *Advaita* master who had told off Ramanuja earlier, became extremely frustrated as he grew old. His philosophy did not give him the peace of mind he so badly needed. He felt lonely and isolated. Even his mother had come under the influence of Ramanuja. She considered him as a manifestation of Lord Varadaraja.

She asked her son Yadava to go and meet Ramanuja, but he, feeling guilty in having bahaved in that treacherous manner earlier hesitated. One day, as he was aimlessly loitering in the streets he came across Tirukaccinambi. He told him of his plight. Tirukaccinambi said: 'Kindly meet Ramanuja. Your restlessness will be over.'

Yadava, taking it as divine summons, went to the Ramanuja math the next day. He was about to fall on his feet, but Ramanuja quickly got up and received him with folded hands. He offered Yadava a seat and spoke to him with great reverence.

Yadava said, 'I am glad to see you. But I have one doubt. How do you hold that the One is Saguna Brahman?' ('Brahman with attributes').

Ramanuja said : 'Kuresa is my best pupil. He will answer you.'

Kuresa said : 'Sir, Brahman has attributes. The *Mundakopanishad* says :.. "Who (He) is all-wise and omniscient". According to the *Svetaswatava Upanishad* : "He is endowed with various highest powers; knowledge, strength and action are His natural attributes."

Kuresa was going on quoting chapter and verse from the various scriptures and Yadava was utlimately convinced. He embraced Ramanuja and said, 'It is true, my son, you are the younger brother of Sri Raghava.'

The conversion of Yadava became the topic of the day. The Srivaishnavites of Srirangam felt that Ramanuja should organise his campaign from Srirangam. Periyanambi had gone earlier for the purpose to bring him from Kanchi, but he had to return because of the quarrel Ramanuja's wife had picked up with his own wife. The Srivaishnavites of Srirangam knew that the situation had now changed. By having organised a math in Kanchi, Ramanuja had become extremely popular and the Vaishnavites of Kanchi would not easily spare him. So the Vaishnavites of Srinrangam hatched a 'conspiracy'.

Tiruvaranga Perumalarayar was a gifted singer. He was one of the chief disciples of Alavandar. He was sent to Kanchi to lure Ramanuja away from that place.

Perumalarayar came to Kanchi and went to the temple direct. There was a good gathering, including Ramanuja. The gifted singer from Srirangam began to recite some hymns from *Divya Prabhanda.* The people around him stood spell-bound. Lord Varadaraja who came to 'possess' the chief priest of the temple told Perumalarayar that he could ask for anything as a price for his a matchless singing. Perumalarayar mentioned his price and it was Ramanuja. The Vaishnavites of Kanchi took it as a divine wish and were ready to reconcile themselves to the departure of Ramanuja for Srirangam.

Ramanuja was given a warm welcome at Srirangam. Vedic mantras were chanted and his arrival was celebrated as a great festival. Ramanuja went to the temple and worshipped Lord Ranganatha. He remembered all the beautiful lines in the Tamil Veda that described the beauty of the Lord in apparent slumber. He realised at that moment that Alavandar was blessing him from above. He had to fulfil the wishes of the departed guru. He felt immensely happy that it was destined by circumstances that he should succeed the great Alavandar. He organised the temple affairs first. The walls in the temple were in ruins and he had them renovated. He laid out beautiful gardens around the temple. He introduced vigorous discipline in the methods of worship. The recitation of the *Divya Prabhanda* was given equal importance along with the chanting of the *Vedas*. A kind of opera with one of the stories from the puranas as its theme was performed to make religion reach the common man. He initiated a series of purposeful temple festivals that lifted religion from the monotony of dry academic discussions. In short, he started the campaign in right earnest and Vaishnavism became a dynamic movement during this period.

VI

Ramanuja met Periyanambi and in all humility expressed regret for the conduct of his wife which had led to his sudden departure from Kanchi. Periyanambi said that he had forgotten the incident. He directed Ramanuja to go to Gosthipurna or Tirukostiyur Nambi and learn from him the *Dvaya Mantra*. Ramanuja reached Tirukostiyur and asked the passers-by where the sage was living. They showed him a humble hut which was the dwelling-place of that great man. Ramanuja went there, bowed before the master's feet and requested him to teach him the meaning of the *Dvaya Mantra*. Gosthipurna who wanted to test Ramanuja's earnestness, did not speak a word. Ramanuja returned to Srirangam feeling disappointed. He went to him a second time and the same thing happened. Thus, Ramanuja went to him eighteen times only to return to Srirangam without receiving the instruction he had sought. His perseverance finally convinced Gosthipurna of his earnestness and so he sent word through a disciple that Ramanuja should come to him alone with his staff and pennon to learn the meaning of the *Dvaya Mantra*.

When Gosthipurna saw Ramanuja again with Kuresa and Dasarathi, he exclaimed, 'Look, I had asked you to come alone.' Ramanuja smiled and said, 'Yes, sir, but with my staff and pennon. Dasarathi is my staff and Kuresa my pennon.'

Gosthipurna was moved by this answer. He began to teach them the mystery-hidden meaning of the *Dvaya Mantra*. He taught them under a vow of secrecy on the understanding that it should never be revealed to others.

Ramanuja understood the mystery-hidden meaning of the eight syllables and three words of the *Mantra*, '*Om Namo*

Narayanaya', which conferred salvation on those who understood its meaning.

Ramanuja felt that salvation should not be restricted only to a select few. This was against the spirit of Vaishnavism. He decided to proclaim the teaching of Gosthipurna to everyone.

Next morning, he climbed the temple tower and, inviting all people to assemble, spoke to the crowd with infinite love and compassion, and revealed to them all the knowledge he had gained from Gosthipurna.

When this news reached Gosthipurna, he sent for Ramanuja and rebuked him, saying, 'So you have broken the vow of secrecy'. 'Yes, sir', replied Ramanuja. Gosthipurna asked, 'Do you know you will go to hell for this?' Ramanuja submitted, 'Yes, sir, but I do not mind going there myself, now that many have been saved.' Gosthipurna was taken aback at this reply. His had been theoretical knowledge of Vaishnavism, but Ramanuja was beginning to practise the faith. The strength of a theory depended upon its utility in application; thus the successor of Alavandar was teaching his preceptor. Gosthipurna, realising this, embraced Ramanuja and gave him his blessing, addressing his disciple as 'Emperuman' (our Lord), leader of the revitalized Vaishnavite cult. Ramanuja prostrated himself before his guru and left for Srirangam.

Ramanuja was directed by Gosthipurna to study the *Tiruvaimoli* of Saint Nammalvar under Maladhara who had learnt it directly from Alavandar.

Ramanuja approached Maladhara and requested him to teach him the Tamil *Prabhanda*. Maladhara taught him each verse exactly as he had learnt it from his master Alavandar. But Ramanuja saw ever-fresh meanings in them and gave expression to them, much to Maladhara's displeasure. He discontinued the tuition saying that Ramanuja seemed to claim superiority over Alavandar. But Ramanuja went to him again and submitted that the virtue of a good text lay in the vistas of meanings it revealed and it was by no means an affront to tradition to offer fresh interpretations. Maladhara came to admire Ramanuja's insight into the teachings of the Alvars.

Ramanuja's rigorous studentship was over by now. He began conducting classes and even those professing rival systems of philosophy were won over by him.

It was during this time that Yajnamurti, an Advaita philosopher, returned after his victorious expedition in the North. He had won laurels wherever he had gone and, when he heard of Ramanuja's popularity, he came to Srirangam to challenge him to a debate.

The debate was arranged in the great temple at Srirangam and it went on for eighteen days. Yajnamurti was moved by the perfect equanimity of Ramanuja. His philosophy must have given him this composure, Yajnamurti concluded. He fell at the feet of Ramanuja and became his disciple. He came to be known as 'Arulala Perumal Emberumanar.'

VII

RAMANUJA took charge of the Srirangam temple and made it a centre for the spread of the Vaishnava movement. He appointed Akalanga, a Chola chieftain, as the temple administrator. How he became Ramanuja's disciple is an interesting story.

Akalanga, when he was a ruler, had Urangavilli or Dhanurdasa as his bodyguard. Dhanurdasa was a tall, broad-shouldered giant, doting on his extremely beautiful wife, Ponnachi and would never allow her to go out of his presence even for a moment.

Once they came to Srirangam to attend the Chitara festival. As Ponnachi walked on the streets, Urangavilli held a coverlet to screen her from the sun. Ramanuja and his disciples were watching this scene. One of the disciples, who could not conceal his contempt for the man who, he thought, was betraying gross uxoriousness, remarked, 'that is ridiculous'. Ramanuja looked at him and smiled. The master said, 'No, it is not uxoriousness. Here is a man who knows how to love and love intensely and cares not what others think. Only such a lover deserves the grace of God. It is not difficult to turn this uneducated man from love of his wife to love of God.'

Ramanuja walked up to him and asked him what he was doing. Urangavilli said that his wife was the most beautiful woman in the world and he was paying homage to beauty. Ramanuja told him that there were things in the world more beautiful and more permanent than any human being. Urangavilli challenged him to point out such a thing. Ramanuja took him to the temple and pointed to the bewitching eyes of Lord Ranganatha which looks like 'the lotus blooming before the morning sun'. Urangavilli stood speechless. He returned from the temple as a devotee of Ramanuja.

Ponnachi who came to know of this approached the master and asked him to accept her also as a devotee.

Akalanga, the chieftain, when he came to know that Urangavilli was contributing all that he earned to the Ramanuja math, wished to see this saintly soul who could effect such a transformation in him. He went, saw and was conquered. He became a staunch Vaishnavite and Ramanuja used his administrative experience for putting the temple affairs into order.

Ramanuja's high principles clashed with the pettiness of the priests of the temple. They did not like his discipline and considered him as an intruder from Kanchi. They wanted to do away with him and decided to poison him.

Ramanuja, as one who had renounced the world, used to visit seven houses daily and collect alms. The priests went to one of the seven houses and prevailed on the owner thereof to mix poison with the food he would serve to Ramanuja. The householder, thus corrupted, asked his wife to do this reprehensible deed. Her protests were of no avail. She was forced to obey him. When Ramanuja came, she served him food with tears in her eyes. Her hands trembled. Ramanuja suspected that something was wrong and he did not eat that food. He threw it into the river and took no further action.

When the disciples came to know of this, they were much concerned. They requested Ramanuja not to beg for alms thenceforth.

But he felt that begging for alms was one of the ways in which a brahmin developed humility. He pointed this out to a woman from Kongu Desa, who had asked him why he should persist in mendicancy when kings were at his beck and call.

Once when he went to Periyanambi's house for alms, he stood before the door reciting verses from Andal's *Tirupavai*. The lines describe a girl calling on Nappina, the Beloved of Lord Krishna, to open the gates of His mansion to let her in. As Ramanuja was reciting these lines, Attulai, the daughter of Periyanambi, came and opened the door. Ramanuja's eyes saw not Attulai but Nappina. He bowed low before the shocked Attulai, who ran inside, greatly frightened. She reported to her father what had happened. Periyanambi came out and saw Ramanuja continuing the recital with closed eyes. He understood the reason for the ecstasy of Ramanuja.

On another occasion, as Ramanuja was walking down the street on his begging mission, he observed a number of boys enacting the deeds of the elders in the temple. They drew a line and called it a temple. They offered worship. The dust of the road was gathered and distributed as *prasad* to every passer-by. The grown-up people laughed at this and threw the dust away. But Ramanuja prostrated himself before what they called the temple and accepted the *prasad* with reverence. He said the young ones too could conceive God and worship Him in their own image. 'Their temple is His authentic dwelling-place, for the children see Him there,' he declared.

VIII

RAMANUJA believed that caste had no place among spiritually advanced people. Many stories are current in this regard.

Urangavilli was not a brahmin by birth. But Ramanuja regarded him as one of his chief disciples. The master used to rest his hand on Villi's shoulder while returning from the river after his daily bath. The brahmin disciples resented this. Once one of them ventured to ask him for an explanation of this strange conduct. Ramanuja was silent but contrived an incident which provided the answer.

Taking one of his disciples into confidence he asked him to

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tear off secretly a portion of the *dhoti* which the inmates of the math had hung up for drying. The following morning when they noticed the theft, they shouted in anger, using language that did not become their way of life. Ramanuja refrained from comment.

Later, he bade two of his disciples to go at night to Villi's hut and remove the ornaments on the person of his wife, Ponnachi. As they were engaged in their task, Ponnachi, who knew that her ornaments were being removed, turned over to the other side so that they could take them all. The disciples, waking her up, ran away. Ramanuja, when he saw them return,asked them to go back to Ponnachi's house and overhear the conversation between the husband and wife. They went back, stood near the door and heard Urangavilli scolding his wife, not for the loss of some jewels, but for what she still had on her person. He was saying, 'Look, you thought the ornaments belonged to you. This sense of possession deprived the poor thieves of the ornaments you still have over your person. One should give without being conscious of the fact that things belong to one.' The disciples were deeply moved by this talk and returning to Ramanuja reported what had transpired.

Next day, Ramanuja called all his disciples to assemble and asked the two disciples to recount their experiences of the preceding night. When they ended the tale, the master smiled. After a pause, Ramanuja said: 'Many of you, finding a bit of your cloth stolen, lost your temper and shouted abuses. But Urangavilli has proved himself a true Vaishnava. He has no sense of possession. A high-born brahmin has to strain himself to cultivate humility. But, Urangavilli, by nature as by birth, is humble. Now you know why I rest my hand on his shoulder when we return from the bath.'

Alone among the disciples, Kuresa was able even at the first meeting to recognise the greatness of Urangavilli. He called him *Mahamati*, because his wisdom had come not from learning and experience but by natural intuition, that is, by the grace of God.

Maranernambi was an 'untouchable' by birth. He was a disciple of Alavandar and a great friend of Periyanambi. He was afflicted with some chronic disease and lived on the outskirts of the town. Periyanambi used to carry food to him there.

Ramanuja knew nothing about Maranernambi. But he once saw Periyanambi going somewhere carrying food in his hand. He followed him to find out for whom the food was meant. He saw Periyanambi serving food to the low-caste, disease-stricken Nambi and was moved by the act of the true Vaishnava. Later, when the orthodox brahmins condemned this action of Periyanambi and fenced off his house, Ramanuja came to his rescue.

Ramanuja considered Attulai as his younger sister. She was given in marriage to a none-too-bright brahmin youth, whose parents were very greedy. In those days, serfs formed part of the dowry and as Periyanambi was not very rich, no menial could be sent along with Attulai to her husband's house. Her mother-in-law used to tease her on this account. Attulai went to her father and wept. She said that he should soon arrange to send a servant to stop her mother-in-law nagging. He asked her to speak to Ramanuja. When the master heard this, he sent one of his disciples Mudaliandan to her house. Attulai's mother-in-law was shocked to see Mudaliandan offering his services to the family. The scholar-servant went right inside the house and started washing the clothes. The poor mother-in-law ran to the Ramanuja math and requested the master to withdraw his disciple. She fell at his feet and felt genuinely sorry for her behaviour. Mudaliandan was called back by Ramanuja.

All the disciples of Ramanuja *lived* the teachings of Vaishnavism; Mudaliandan never considered that washing clothes in someone's house at his master's bidding was beneath his dignity.

He did this job with the same enthusiasm and devotion as he would give a discourse on the *Gita*. In fact, the work in the Ramanuja math was distributed among the disciples without any reference to their scholarship, status, or caste. Kidambiaccan managed the mess; Urangavilli had charge of the treasury and Mudaliandan looked after the daily engagements of Ramanuja. They were all trained not only in the theory of religion but in the practice of it through humility and service.

IX

RAMANUJA decided to go to the Tirupati Hills to study the *Ramayana* in the company of Tirumalainambi, his uncle. Accordingly he started on his pilgrimage accompanied by his closest disciples.

He arrived at a place called Astasahasra grama. He had two disciples there, Yajnesa and Varadarya. The former was a rich man and the latter a poor man.

On his arrival at the village, Ramanuja went to Varadarya's hut. The disciple had gone out to collect alms. His wife felt extremely happy to see the distinguished visitor. But she could not come out of the hut as she was scantily dressed owing to poverty. Ramanuja realised the situation and threw inside the coloured garment that covered his head. Thus provided, she came out with folded hands, prostrated herself before Ramanuja and welcomed him.

Ramanuja entered the hut. The woman knew that there was not a single grain of food in the house. She thought for a moment and decided what she should do. There was a rich merchant who had had his eyes on her for a long time. She excused herself from Ramanuja for a short while and went to the merchant's shop to have on credit the groceries she needed. She knew the price she might have to pay for them. The infatuated merchant let her have the goods on credit.

After Ramanuja had left the place, her husband came home. She told him what had happened. The husband said that they should both go to the merchant and settle the account. When they reached his house, the merchant was shocked to see the husband. Varadarya said, 'Look, I have come here to offer you my wife's body, if you wish to take it. We understand each other, my wife and I, and her heart is mine.' The merchant recovered from his surprise and he fell at the feet of Varadarya, saying, 'I shall take no price for the goods. You have opened my eyes, and that is payment enough!'

When he came to know of this, Ramanuja sent for the merchant and accepted him as his disciple, showing once again that none was beyond redemption.

And Ramanuja advised Yajnesa to give up pride and, by way of sacrifice without selfishness, to wash the clothes of the devotees. This service helped develop humility in him.

The master later reached the Tirupati Hills. It is said that he climbed the hills on all fours since he would not desecrate them by touching them only with his feet. He met his disciple

Anantasuri and was delighted to see the beautiful flower garden he had raised. He embraced the faithful disciple saying, 'In these flowers for the Lord's worship, I reap the fruit of my former care of you, my child!'

The garden was filled with sweet fragrance from the flower-beds and fruit-trees. Bees and birds rent the air with music. The cool ponds were covered with lotuses and other flowers. Ramanuja, who loved the poetry of earth as he loved the poetry of words, was deeply moved; he closed his eyes in silent adoration of the Lord.

He stayed with his uncle Tirumalainambi for a year, studying the *Ramayana* from the *visistadvaita* angle. One day as he was returning from his uncle's flower-garden, he saw a person put his fingers into the mouth of a snake. He went near him and recognised his cousin Govinda, who answered his unspoken query and said, 'The poor snake has its mouth open for long, because there is a thorn in its tongue. I am extracting it.' After Govinda had finished his job, Ramanuja embraced him and said : 'You are a true Vaishnava. You relieve suffering wherever you see it.'

As he returned from Tirupati to Srirangam, he took Govinda also with him. Govinda's mother was glad to see her son back. But her joy was not complete because her son was not living with his wife but spending his time in spiritual pursuits. She asked Ramanuja to direct her son to live with his wife. The master told Govinda to spend at least one night with his wife. This was, in fact, a test of Govinda's strength or conviction. Govinda agreed. The night was spent by Govinda and his wife talking of God. Next morning, when it was reported to Ramanuja that Govinda had spent a night thus with his wife, he sent for him and declared him worthy to be ordained as a sannyasi.

Govinda was a great theological scholar and he came to be known as Embar.

There is a traditional story that Ramanuja gave Lord Venkateswara His divine discus and conch. The legend is interpreted in different ways. One of the interpretations is that Tirupati was once the abode of Lord Shiva and that Ramanuja converted it into the abode of Lord Vishnu. But this is refuted by others who say that Ramanuja merely restored the divine discus and conch which had been missing for some time.

It was during this time that Ramanuja decided to write his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*. He had created a proper religious climate all over the country and his fame had spread far and wide. He thought that he was now fully equipped to fulfil the vows he had taken at Alavandar's death-bed. But he needed one more thing.

He had heard of a work called *Bodayana Vrithi* which had been highly commended by Sankara in his commentary. A copy of this work was available only in Kashmir. Ramanuja accompanied by Kuresa and a few others went to Kashmir to study this work. The Pandits there were reluctant to show the manuscripts to him. Ramanuja met the King of Kashmir who was impressed with his personality and scholarship. He asked the Pandits of his court to show the manuscripts to Ramanuja. Later he permitted him to take them to Srirangam. But on his return journey, the Pandits who followed Ramanuja stole the manuscripts back. Ramanuja felt disheartened. But Kuresa consoled him with the assurance that he (Kuresa) had committed to memory the whole work and there was no need to worry over the theft of the manuscripts

Thus, everything was ready for the writing of the commentary and this he began as soon as he returned to Srirangam.

X

THE remarkable memory of Kuresa came in handy to Ramanuja in writing his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*. Kuresa sat down to write what the master went on dictating. But it was not a mere mechanical performance. If the amanuensis disagreed with the interpretation, he stopped writing. Once Ramanuja observed his disciple sitting still without writing and asked for an explanation. Kuresa said that Ramanuja's formulation was inconsistent with the *visistadvaita* philosophy. The master paused for a while and agreed with Kuresa.

Kuresa's wife Andal was also a great scholar. She wanted to participate in the religious discussions. Ramanuja respected her for her vast learning and paid due weight to her opinions.

Ramanuja's commentary is known as the *Sri Bhasya*. It sums up the philosophy of *visistadvaita* which speaks of a personal God who is One but is characterised by attributes (*visista*).

Ramanuja's popularity increased after the completion of the *Sri Bhasya*. The Vaishnavites all over the South held him in great esteem for not only had he fulfilled one of the wishes of Alavandar but also had effectively refuted the rival systems of philosophy. The writing of the *Sri Bhasya* was thus a major event in the history of Vaishnavism.

Ramanuja went on a pilgrimage to all the places which the Alvars had visited and celebrated in song. And everywhere he introduced reforms in the rituals of worship and the mode of administration of the temples. His chief aim was to make religion reach the common man.

In the Pandya country, as his party was proceeding through Tirupulingudi, the birth-place of Tirumangai Alvar, they were met by an untouchable woman, who was asked to move aside by one of his disciples. She asked him to which side she should move to avoid pollution, for the entire universe was the holy habitation of the Lord. Ramanuja turned and told his disciple: 'Look, this woman has taught you a lesson in true Vaishnavism.'

He visited Tirukudandai, Tirumallirunsolai, Tirupullani, Alvar Tirunagari and Tirukurunkudi.

Traditional sources relate a story that in Tirukurunkudi the Lord took the form of a Srivaishnava and asked Ramanuja how he hoped to reform the people, when even God had failed earlier in spite of His *avatar*. He requested the master to teach him the *mantra* which was the secret of his success. Ramanuja taught him the hidden truth of *Dvayamantra* and declared that there was no better medicine for the ills of humanity than faith. It is said that the Lord blessed him and disappeared.

When Ramanuja went to Tiruvanparisaram, he had to encounter many scholars professing rival systems of philosophy. They challenged the validity of his new commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*. He won the debates,and it is said the goddess Saraswati blessed him that he would be thereafter be known as Sri Bhashyakar.

Ramanuja returned to Srirangam after his successful campaign in the deep South. Vaishnavism by now had become an established religion and Ramanuja its undisputed leader.

History records the ill-treatment meted out to Ramanuja and his followers by the Chola king who ruled at that time. Ramanuja lived from 1017 A.D. to 1137 A.D. This covered the history of five Chola kings from Rajendra I to Vikrama. The Cholas were at the pinnacle of their glory during this time. Rajaraja had established a vast empire and it was consolidated by his successors. There was a great religious renaissance brought about by the devotional songs of the Alvars and Nayanmars. Big temples came to be raised in response to the religious and cultural dynamism of the age.

In Tamilnad the opposition to non-Vedic religions like Buddhism and Jainism came from the religious philosophies of *Advaita*, *Visistadvaita* and *Saiva Siddhanta*.

Visistadvaita and *Saiva Siddhanta* were genuine products of Tamil soil, so much so that they clashed with each other. Vishnu was the supreme God for the Visistadvaitin, whereas for the Saiva Siddhantist Shiva was the supreme Being.

The Saiva Siddhantins enjoyed royal patronage during Ramanuja's time. They feared that their cult was in danger as Ramanuja was becoming increasingly popular. They sought the help of the king.

The identity of the king who acted on behalf of the Saiva Siddhantists is still a matter for speculation. The traditional accounts describe him as 'Kirumi Kanda Chola' (one eaten by worms). Many scholars believe that it should be Kulothunga I. But others say that the king was also known as 'Sabda Vishnu Vardhana', which indicates he was not given to religious bigotry. But it is on record that Ramanuja left the Chola country to escape the king's wrath, a little before 1100 A.D. The king who ruled during this time was Kulothunga I (1070-1118 A.D.). So it is reasonable to assume that the king involved in the persecution of Ramanuja was Kulothunga I.

In the early period of history politics and religion were intermingled. The king always ruled with the power he derived from the orthodox and influential sections of the community. Kulothunga I was no exception. As Ramanuja was against some of the traditional values held sacred by the conservatives of the period, they prevailed on the king and made him believe that the *Visistadvaitic* philosopher was out to disturb and destroy social harmony. This probably had provoked the king to take action. The supremacy of Vishnu or Shiva was beside the issue.

In a way, the persecution of Ramanuja by the Chola king helped Vaishnavism. For travelling beyond the borders of Tamilnad, Vaishnavism extended its influence also in Mysore.

XI

IT IS SAID the Chola king was asked by his advisers to extort from Ramanuja the confession that 'there is no God higher than Shiva'.

The king sent some of his men to the math to bring the master to his court. At that time Ramanuja was having his bath in the river. Kuresa foresaw the danger that lay ahead of his guru and so without telling anyone he put on the robes of a sanyasin and proceeded to the king's court. Periyanambi offered to accompany him and both of them reached the palace.

The king had not seen Ramanuja and he mistook Kuresa for the master. He was impressed with the intellectual glow on his face. Naluran, who had for a time pretended to be Kuresa's disciple but was in fact the king's spy, whispered into the royal ears that the visitor was Kuresa. It made no difference to the king and he threw a palm-leaf before Kuresa and asked him to sign it. Kuresa read the text which read: '*Sivaat paradharam nasti*', meaning 'there is no God greater than Shiva.' Kuresa added '*Tronam nasti tataparam.*' This was a joke played on the king by Kuresa. 'Shiva' also meant a kind of measure and Kuresa exploited this pun to ridicule what had already been written on the palm-leaf. The meaning of the added line was 'there are measures bigger than Sivam'. The infuriated king decreed that the eyes of Kuresa should be plucked out. But before the king's men reached him, Kuresa pulled his own eyes out saying: 'This is the price I should pay for having set my eyes on such an intolerant fanatic!' In a fit of fury, the king's men fell upon Periyanambi and plucked out his eyes.

Kuresa and Periyanambi were conducted by their faithful followers to the outskirts of the Chola capital.

The aged Periyanambi could not stand the physical torture inflicted on him and died of exhaustion and agony. Kuresa was heart-broken but did not lose courage. He turned to his followers and said: 'The day of our deliverance will surely come!'

Kuresa on his return to Srirangam was not allowed by a royal order to enter the temple. He was told that he would be admitted if he publicly disowned Ramanuja. Kuresa said that the temple was not worth visiting on such terms.

Ramanuja, who came to know of the royal bidding, was advised by his disciples to leave the Chola country in the interests of Vaishnavism. He was deeply moved by Kuresa's sacrifice and felt the need for action.

He left Srirangam and reached the Nilgiri forest. He came across some hunters who were staunch devotees of Vaishnavism. Their leader was Nallan Chakravarti. He was a brahmin by birth but treated all as children of God.

Once he performed the funeral rites of a poor untouchable and he was ostracised by the other brahmins. He did not bother much about this but carried the message of love to the unspoilt forest folk.

The hunters were pained to hear of the persecution of their faith in the Chola country and they requested Ramanuja to stay with them forever. But he had other plans.

He wanted to go further westward and preach the philosophy of *Visistadvaita* to the people in Mysore. The hunters of the Nilgiri hills made convenient arrangements for his journey.

Ramanuja reached Thondanur, a small town in Mysore State, which is now known as Thonnur. The Hoysala dynasty was in power at that time and the name of the king was Vittala Deva.

Vittala Deva was a Jain. He became maimed in a battle with the Muslim emperor of Delhi. He had a daughter who was 'possessed' by some 'evil spirit'.

At the time of Ramanuja's visit, the king was angry with the Jain monks, as they refused to attend the royal feast because he was a cripple and their religion forbade eating with the disabled.

When Vittala Deva came to know that a great man had arrived from the Chola country, he invited him to his court. The king was greatly pleased that Ramanuja did not treat him as unworthy of respect because of his deformity. Ramanuja drove away the 'evil spirit' that possessed his daughter. Vittala Deva became a Vaishnavite and took the name of Vishnu Vardhana Raya.

Thousands of Jains in Mysore followed the king and embraced Vaishnavism.

During his stay in Mysore, Ramanuja went once to Melkot, also known as Tirunarayanapuram. Walking through a dense forest, he was attracted by the fragrance of 'Tulsi'. He looked around and offered prayers. He discovered an image of Vishnu concealed beneath an ant-hill. With the support of Vittala Deva he had a temple constructed at the place and got the icon installed in the temple. He was told that there used to be another image which had been taken away by the Muslim invaders of Delhi. Traditional legends speak even of Ramanuja's visit to Delhi to recover the image. The Muslim emperor's daughter was having this icon as her cherished possession. It is said Ramanuja went to the emperor, argued with him for several days and at last secured permission to take back the image. The origin of this legend is not traceable.

On his arrival in Mysore, there was an attempt by his enemies to steal the image from him. The untouchables who stood by Ramanuja defeated this attempt. Pleased with their timely intervention, Ramanuja introduced the practice of allowing untouchables into the Tirunarayana temple. It is notable that the principle of Harijans entering temples had thus been established long before untouchability was legally abolished.

There is a lake in Tondannur called 'Moti Talah'. The origin of this lake is attributed to Ramanuja. Hilton Brown says that it was under Ramanuja's direction that a dam was constructed to allow a continuous flow of water from a small river nearby to this lake.

Ramanuja is said to have established 700 maths in Melkot. He had fifty-two important disciples who were deeply devoted to him. When Ramanuja decided to go back to Srirangam after the demise of Kulothunga I, the Melkot disciples refused to part from him. Ramanuja convinced them that they should show their affection for him by keeping the torch of Vaishnavism ever burning in their country.

At Melkot, Ramanuja was able to introduce more far-reaching reforms than any he could have done at Srirangam. His heart was dead set against untouchability. Indeed he had his own word for the untouchables—'Tirukulattar' (people of noble descent).

Finding that the daughter of the Muslim emperor was greatly attached to the image of Visnu brought from Melkot, he bade a representation of the princess to be kept at the feet of Lord Narayana forever. Ramanuja looked not only beyond differences of caste but beyond those of religion also.

He stayed in Mysore for twelve years. When however he heard the news that the intolerant Chola king had passed away, he decided to return home. He gave a detailed code of temple procedure to the Vaishnavites at Melkot and left for Srirangam.

XII

ON HIS RETURN to Srirangam, Ramanuja went and saw his leading disciple Kuresa. He had lost his physical eyes, but not his inner vision. He felt immensely happy to have the master back.

Ramanuja embraced Kuresa and said: 'I have been purified by your touch. I am proud of you.'

The blind Kuresa shed tears of joy. With a heavy heart the master said: 'Let us go to Kanchi and pray for your eyes to Lord Varadaraja.'

Kuresa was not keen on getting back his sight but the suggestion to go to Kanchi enthused him profoundly. He agreed to this proposal and soon composed a long poem called 'Varadarajastvam'. Ramanuja asked him to recite it at the temple.

The guru accompanied by his disciple reached Kanchi. When Kuresa started reciting the poem he had written for this occasion, the melody and the meaning of this great work moved Lord Varadaraja. He 'possessed' the temple priest and through him asked Kuresa, 'My child, name thy wish....'

Kuresa was at that time thinking of Naluran, the Judas who had betrayed him to the Chola king. He immediately said: 'My Lord, make Naluran the object of your supreme grace.'

'Be it so...', said the Lord.

The whole thing happened in a split second and the people who stood around Kuresa were completely stunned. Ramanuja touched the shoulders of Kuresa and said with feeling: 'Can there be anybody equal to you, my son? You have prayed for the welfare of your enemy at the cost of your eyes. This is the day for the Vaishnavites to rejoice.' The other disciples were feeling sad that Kuresa had not got back his sight. So the master spoke to Kuresa: 'I know you experience transcendental joy by this supreme sacrifice. But, my son, look around. Everyone is unhappy because you are not blessed with the power of vision by the Lord. So kindly pray again.... It is selfishness to keep the joy to yourself...."

Kuresa smiled. He prostrated himself before the Lord and said: 'Give me back my sight if only to see your bewitching beauty.'

The Lord said: 'I grant your wish and you will not see any other material object.'

Ramanuja embraced Kuresa and addressed the disciples thus: 'It is a triumph for our religion that we have Kuresa as one belonging to us. He has secured *moksha* for his enemies and through him I can seek the liberation of one and all.'

Kuresa's only ambition after he had lost his eyes was to meet Ramanuja and now this being fulfilled, he was prepared to die. He was confined to bed a little later and Ramanuja realised that his disciple was on his way to reach the lotus-feet of the Lord. He consoled those around him with these words: 'Kuresa is going to Him earlier than all of us and to this extent he is blessed. It means God has ordained that the rest of us have to do many more things in this human form and we shall not fail Him. Kuresa leaves behind a son, who is no less dedicated and brilliant than his father, the noble Parasara, who will one day keep under his control the vast Vaishnava empire.'

So saying Ramanuja placed a crown of flowers on the head of Parasara and everyone gave blessings to the young man.

Kuresa's face was lit up with supreme satisfaction. With his hands holding the feet of Ramanuja, he died in peace.

Kuresa's body was cremated on the banks of the Kaveri and there was devotional singing the whole day. Thousands of Vaishnavas came from all directions to pay their last homage to Kuresa. The poor, the disabled and the old were fed in memory of the departed soul.

The death of Kuresa deprived Ramanuja of his most devoted disciple but he kept the grief to himself. He never left Srirangam thereafter.

One day Lord Ranganatha was taken out in procession in the street and people flocked to have His *darshan*. The idol was beautifully decorated with flowers and garlands. Ramanuja and his disciples who at that time were in the math came out and worshipped the Lord. Ramanuja looked around and found that one of his pupils Andhrapurna was not there. He went inside and found him engaged in work in the kitchen. Ramanuja asked : 'Why did you not come out for *darshan*?' Andhrapurna replied : 'Sir, I am boiling milk for you. Service to the guru is service to God.'

Ramanuja's greatness lies in the fact that he was able to instil the spirit of humility into his disciples. According to Ananta Alvan, one of his disciples, a true Vaishnavite is like a crane, a cock and salt. A crane does not bother about the small fishes but catches the big ones. So also a true Vaishnavite is after deeper values of life and remains indifferent to frivolous matters. A cock picks up the essential food from the dust-heap and leaves the rest. A Vaishnavite grasps only the essence from the *Sastras*. No food is taken without salt. The society survives only by the service of a true Vaishnavite.

In the fraternity of the Bhagavatas all are equal. Once Nampillai, the pupil of Nanjeer, was walking holding the hand of Sivakaraipillai, his disciple. But on their way, the latter saw a Srivaishnavite lying down and he did not get up even after seeing Nampillai. The disciple became angry and said : 'Look the master is coming, move aside.' Nampillai immediately pulled out his hand from the hold and walked alone. The disciple could not understand this action and ran after the guru. He cried : 'Sir, have I insulted you?'

'Yes', said Nampillai and walked ahead without turning back. He added : 'An insult to a fellow-being is an insult to me... All of us are His creations and I do not think I am in any way superior to that Srivaishnavite whom you have insulted. You have not imbibed the spirit of true Vaishnavism, my boy.'

Ramanuja had many women disciples, and, as an exponent of a system that regarded Sri and Her Kripa as essential to Mukti, he recognised their status in society. Some of them also participated in metaphysical discussions.

Kuresa's wife Andal was a great scholar and one of the leading women of the Ramanuja math. There is an interesting legend about her. She once took Lord Ranganatha to task when her husband had to go without food as it was raining incessantly. 'One true Bhakta is starving and this does not move you, my Lord', she said. But a few minutes later, there was a knock at her door and she opened it. The temple priest was there and he had brought food for Kuresa. A woman of great courage and deep learning, she was respected by Ramanuja.

Ponnachi was the wife of Urangavilli, whose devotion to her husband and God was the admiration of one and all of her time. Ramanuja dispelled the small thoughts of [illegible] his followers regarding his partiality to this noble couple by engineering an incident, which we read of earlier.

There was one Kongupratti who had come to Srirangam from Kongudesa (modern Coimbatore) because of a famine in her native place. She had planned to stay in Srirangam for a few days but after meeting Ramanuja, she extended her stay indefinitely. There were many other women in the Ramanuja math who had come to Srirangam from distant places—Tiruvanantapuratu Ammai, Tiruvattaru Ammai, Tiruvanparisaratu Ammai, and others. This only shows that Ramanuja was the first religious leader who treated women on equal terms with men.

Ramanuja did not ever think that he was infallible. He had the moral courage to admit his faults. We saw earlier how quick he was to recognise merit in Kuresa's arguments when the latter ventured to contradict him, while he was dictating the *Sri Bhasya* to him. There was another incident when a woman from Tirupulingudi gave him a pleasant surprise by her intellectual alertness. Ramanuja had asked her how far Tirukurugur was from her town and she had asked him in return whether he knew the Alvar hymns. Immediately Ramanuja remembered that particular line in one of the hymns which said that Tirukurugur was at 'a calling distance' from Tirupulingudi. Ramanuja turned to his disciples and said : 'Even a commoner in this Pandya country is more than a match for me.'

Ramanuja taught his disciples that a true disciple never suffered from self-pity or sought sympathy from others. A story is related in this regard. Garuda, the divine bird that carries Vishnu, once went to an alien country. A Srivaishnavite woman was living in that place and she entertained him. Garuda took pity on that woman for living in a non-Vaishnavite country. As this thought occurred, his wings fell apart. Garuda could not understand why this happened. God spoke: 'A true Vaishnavite never seeks sympathy or even thinks he is superior to offer sympathy to others.'

After his return from Mysore to Srirangam, Ramanuja tried to introduce many more reforms in temple worship and administration. Whereas it was smooth sailing for him in Melkot, all his attempts to put into practice his pet ideas met with some resistance from the temple priests. We saw earlier how some of them had tried to do away with him and how he had survived. Though it is on record that Ramanuja fecilitated the Harijans' entry in the Melkot temple, it is surprising that he did not try to implement this at the Srirangam temple. It only proved the power of the Srirangam orthodoxy. But Ramanuja relentlessly tried to wean religion, to some extent, from its narrow, out-moded, dogma-oriented practices.

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XIII

Ramanuja lived to the ripe old age of one hundred and twenty years. After his return from Mysore, he spent the twenty years till his death consolidating the work he had done earlier. One by one all his disciples died. Kuresa's death was a blow to him, but he realised that while the physical body was subject to the laws of Nature, the soul rested in peace in Vaikunta, the home of Eternal Happiness. The master consoled Andal who, did not long survive her husband.

Urangavilli, a great friend of Kuresa, retired from all the activities of the math and met his death in peace. When he died, Ramanuja ordered a grand funeral for him. His body was placed in a flower-studded palanquin and carried by bhagavatas and brahmins. His wife Ponnachi died of shock and her body was cremated with her husband's.

Ramanuja's own end was drawing near. His cult had spread far and wide and thousands of people were coming every day to the math to have a *darshan* of him. Once exclusively possessed by a few, Vaishnavism had now become a popular religion claiming adherents all over South India.

He had fulfilled the three wishes of Alavandar and his life's work was complete. He had written the *Visistadvaitic* commentary for the *Brahma Sutras*; he had given the name Parasara Pattar to Kuresa's first son and thus perpetuated the memory of the great rishi. The departed master's third wish to express gratitude to Nammalvar was fulfilled by Ramanuja by giving the name of the great Alvar to his spiritual heir Nampillai, whom he called '*Tirukurugai Pillan.*'

He also entrusted Nampillai with the task of writing a commentary on the hymns of the Alvars. When the disciple showed him the commentary he had written, he felt immensely pleased with it. He called it *Bhagavat Visayam* and declared that it must be ranked with his own *Sri Bhasyam*. The tradition of writing commentaries on the Alvars' hymns started with Nampillai.

Traditional account speaks of Ramanuja's visit at this time to Chidambaram. Kulothunga II, a staunch Saivite king, was said to have ordered the removal of the image of Vishnu from the temple. The image was thrown into the sea. Ramanuja went to Chidambaram and re-installed the image.

Ramanuja nominated seventy-four heads to be in charge of the propagation of the Vaishnava religion to ensure the smooth running of the administration after him. Tirukurugai Pillan, Nadadur Alvan, Kidambiaccan and Mudaliandan were set the task of popularising the *Sri Bhasyam*. Tirukurugai Pillan had the additional responsibility of teaching his own commentary on the Alvar hymns. He was called 'Bhashya Bhagavat Vishaya Upaya Simhasenathipati'.

Ramanuja took charge of Kuresa's two sons Pattar and Srirama Pillai and asked his cousin Embar to give them special training in Vedanta.

Pattar was a prodigy like Alavandar. When he was a child playing in the streets, he came across a proud scholar, walking with his head held high. Pattar asked him who he was. The scholar replied that he was one who had never been defeated in *tarka*. Hearing this pompous reply, Pattar held a handful of dust in his hand and asked the scholar to tell its exact measure. The scholar did not expect such a question from a child and certainly did not know the answer. He looked at the boy without answering. Pattar smiled and

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Before he died, the master called together his disciples and told them that his mortal body was subject to the laws of nature and would now go the way of all flesh.

He lay with his head on the lap of Embar and his legs on the lap of Vaduganambi. The other disciples stood with tears in their eyes. Ramanuja said: 'No one should weep for there is no such thing as 'loss' in this world. If one has faith, one will realise that it is only the body that perishes and the *Atman* lives for ever. Man is never alone, for God is ever within him. Those who forsake Him forsake themselves.'

He is said to have summed up his philosophy on his deathbed and asked his disciples to carry the message of *Visistadvaita* with faith in God. His last message is as follows:

'Worship Srivaishnavas as you would the Lord. Have faith in their teachings. Never be slaves to your senses. Worldly knowledge has its limits. Steep yourself in the traditional teachings of the Acharyas. If the guru's grace falls on you, the attraction of the senses will cease. A person who has attained knowledge with the help of the guru will cease to be a slave to desire. A true *bhakta* should learn to relish the utterance of the names and glories of God's devotees as he would the utterance of God's name and glories. He who worships the Bhagavatas attains God quickly. A true Vaishnava seeks no selfish advantage for himself. One hour at least must be set apart every day for the worship of God and some time for study of the sacred writings of the Alvars and the Acharyas. Seek the company of those who have surrendered themselves to God and avoid those who have no faith in the Ultimate Reality. Do not go near those who are after sense enjoyments. He is fit to occupy the infernal regions who considers the image of God as a mere piece of stone, the guru as a mere human-being, sanctified water as mere water, the sacred mantras as a collection of sounds and the Supreme Lord as one of the minor Devas.

'One who has surrendered himself to God should have no thought for his future; the least doubt defeats the very purpose of self-surrender. The present life is determined by past karma; hence to grieve over is meaningless. The performance of one's duties is not to achieve worldly ends but to serve God.

'Study the *Sribhashya* and teach it to others. If this is not possible, study the works of Nammalvar and other Alvars and teach them to others. If you are not able to do this, live in a holy place serving God and His servants. Failing this also, live in Yadavgiri constructing a small hut. If even this is not possible, live where you are, surrender yourself to God and contemplate on the *dvaya mantra*. If you find all these things difficult and beyond your capacity, seek a Vaishnava and live by his words, uprooting your egoism.

'In this world the Srivaishnavas are your friends. Those who have no faith in God are your enemies. Worldly people are to be pitied; they are neither enemies nor friends. The company of Bhagavatas must delight you as the enjoyment of fine betel, flowers and scents. The sight of your enemies should give you the same revulsion as that of a snake, a tiger or a conflagration. The sight of worldly men should move you no more than that of stocks and stones. Shun the company of enemies and worldly men and rejoice in the communion with devotees. By their grace your inner light will grow.

'Purity of thought leads to purity of action. Do not find fault with others. No one is perfect and none is competent to talk about the weakness of another. Goodness consists in service to others, and this means active help.'

As he spoke these words he passed away. The disciples surrounding the body wept disconsolately.

All the Vaishnavites in and around Srirangam paid their last respects, chanting Vedic hymns and the Alvars' songs. The body was taken in a decorated chariot and laid to rest in the Srirangam temple.

Icons of his were installed at Tirupati, Kanchi and Perumbudur.

The philosophy of Ramanuja influenced other systems of philosophy. The new movements that flourished in the north owed much to his teachings. Ramananda, Chaitanya and Ramdas, leaders of the *Bhakti* movement, who came centuries later, met the onslaught of rival faiths with the help of Ramanuja's achievements in establishing a spiritual brotherhood based on devotion to the Supreme Being.

XIV

TALL AND HANDSOME, Ramanuja was a born leader of men. The doyen of the Vaishnavites at Srirangam, Alavandar, the moment he set eyes on Ramanuja from a distance during his brief sojourn at Kanchi, made up his mind that the young man was to be his successor. Although he had many erudite scholars as his disciples, the ageing Alavandar sent for Ramanuja to nominate him for leadership. Ramanuja fulfilled his expectations. He gave continuity to the *visistadvaitic* religion and also made it a dynamic force in the religious history of the country.

Ramanuja mastered all the philosophies of his time. He studied *Advaita* under Yadava Prakasa. A study of his *Sri Bhashyam* shows his scholarship in almost all fields of knowledge. He equipped himself thoroughly before writing this commentary. He had systematised the teachings of *Visistadvaita* in its metaphysical, moral and spiritual aspects. In establishing his thesis, a scholar has to refute other theories about the same problem. It is a healthy warfare so long as it does not involve personalities, but is restricted to philosophical arguments. Ramanuja differed from Yadava Prakasa's philosophy but never bore any ill-will towards him. When Yadava grew tired of his own school of thought and sought Ramanuja's guidance, he was welcomed into the fold.

Ramanuja vanquished his opponents in debates not merely by his power of exposition but also by his temperament. He knew how to contain himself even when provoked. We have noted how Yajna Murti who came like thunder and lightening merged into silence before Ramanuja's sweetness and light. The man who came to conquer was conquered.

According to Ramanuja, the proof of essence was in existence. Ideas were meant to be translated into action. Before Ramanuja's time, the Vaishnavite religion was confined to small groups that lay scattered about at different places. It was Ramanuja who unified them all and made the religion a movement with a mass base and mass appeal.

In fact, his disciples came from all castes and he inculcated in them all a feeling of innate unity. There is a traditional story which illustrates this point.

There lived on the outskirts of Srirangam a pariah who used to feel intoxicated with joy as he sang the hymns of the Alvars. Ramanuja, as he went to the river every day, used to hear this *bhakta's* singing and one day he decided to visit his house. He asked his other disciples to move ahead as they were returning from the bath in the river and entered the house of this untouchable. The poor man was overwhelmed to see the master and he fell at his feet. Ramanuja stayed with him for three hours, listening to his chanting of the hymns.

Ramanuja was a sound psychologist. When the disciples ridiculed Urangavilli for his blind love, Ramanuja knew that behind such love lay a heart of gold, and declared 'Vaishnavism is the religion that teaches one how to love and Urangavilli is the right man to spread it.'

Faith and emotional fervour are the bed-rock of popular religion. No religion that banished the personal God from its system has succeeded anywhere. The conception of God as 'Bhuvana Sundara' which Ramanuja emphasised caught the imagination of the people. It embodied the triple ideal of truth, goodness and beauty.

The great Alvars who came in the authentic tradition of the ancient rishis spoke of living beings as born in *Ananda* and of God as the embodiment of *Ananda*. The devotees enjoyed bliss at various levels, the highest and the truest being the experience of God.

Avatar or the descent of God in the form of man on earth, had an irresistible charm for the devotees. The righteousness of Rama and the bewitching beauty of Krishna had been sung of and enshrined by the Alvars in their immortal poetry. Andal, the divine daughter of Periyalvar sang of Krishna and Krishna alone, the 'Jaro Cora Sikhamani', who stole away the hearts of women. Her poems expressed the rapture of the mystical union.

Ramanuja made a study of the Alvars' hymns compulsory for his disciples. He was seen always reciting to himself the beautiful lines from the Tamil *Prabhanda*, whose devotion and faith spoke the language of the heart.

Hindu society was caste-ridden and one's birth in a particular caste was attributed to one's former karma. This belief tended to weaken human initiative as well as faith in the redemptive grace of God. Ramanuja felt that the call of God to participate in His '*lila*' was open to all mankind and that excluding a community from all social contacts was a sin as bad as the one they were believed to have committed in an earlier birth. Ramanuja was moved by the story of Tirupanalvar, the pariah devotee who was carried to the temple by the brahmin priests on their shoulders. Ramanuja popularised and carried into practice the teachings emerging from the lives of the Alvars.

XV

Before Ramanuja, stress was laid exclusively on learning. But Ramanuja realised that the strength of a philosophy depended upon the following it commanded, that knowledge was auxiliary to action. He recognised *karma* as observance of the moral law of Dharma. He refuted the theory that it was the effect of *avidya* (ignorance). He asserted that *jnana* (knowledge) gave relevance to practice, and that *karma* inspired by a sense of social obligation and justice made life meaningful.

Ramanuja did not wish his movement to languish after his death. In order to establish continuity, he left his following to the loving care of seventy-four of his disciples.

Parasara Pattar was his successor to the Srisukti throne. Pillan was in charge of the propagation of the *Visistadvaitic* commentaries. Pillan's disciple was Vishnu Chitta who was the Acharya to the famous Nadadur Amma.

Parasara's disciple was Nanjeer who wrote the commentary for *Tiruvaimoli* known as *The Nine Thousand.* His disciple was Periyavaccan Pillai who wrote the famous *Twenty-four thousand* (commentary on *Divya Prabhanda*). Vadaku Tiruveeti Pillai, who wrote the incomparable '*Idu*' (commentary on Tiruvaimoli; *Idu* means equal to the original) succeeded Nampillai, and his son Pillailoka Acharya is generally considered to be the founder of the Tenkalai School of Vaishnavism.

Vedanta Desika was the greatest teacher after Ramanuja. He came in the authentic tradition of the masters, Appular, Nadadur Amma, Vishnu Chitta and Pillan. Even at the early age of twenty, he came to be known as 'Sarvatantra Svantantra'—'one who has mastered all arts and sciences'. Like Ramanuja he also had to leave Srirangam during the raid of Mallik-Kaffur when thousands of Vaishnavites were slain. This orgy of terror did not last long. Vedanta Desika returned to Srirangam and was happy to find the image of Lord Ranganatha reinstalled.

His works cover a vast ground under several heads such as epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics and religion. He combined poetry with religion. *Sankalpa Suryodaya*, *Hamsa Sandesha* and *Rahasyatraya Sara* are his outstanding works.

Ramanuja influenced directly or indirectly several movements all over India. Nimbarka, the Telugu brahmin, was a contemporary of his. He was considerably influenced by Ramanuja although he had written a separate commentary on the *Saurabha*. Nimbarka, while differing from Advaita, comes close to *Visistadvaita*.

The exponent of *Dvaita Darsana* came a little after Ramanuja. Though Ramanuja's influence is evident in his philosophy, yet he rejected the theory of 'aprthaksidda Visheshana' (inseparable attribute) and denied that Brahman was the *upadanakarana* (immanent cause) of the universe. It was in his total opposition to *Maya Vada* that he agreed with *Visistadvaita*.

The *bhakti* movement in the North owes its origin to Ramananda who lived in the 14th century. Like Ramanuja, he also divested the Vedic religion of its excessive rituals and formalities. He found in Rama the ideal embodiment of personal, family and social dharma.

Sri Krishna Chaitanya, the founder of Vaishanavism in Bengal, was a staunch devotee of Lord Krishna and spread the cult of Krishna Prana throughout the country. According to him, the sweetness of love is the essential element in religion. Essence and existence are reconciled in the conception of Lord Krishna. The influence of Ramanuja can be found in this theory which gave rise to the Radha Krishna cult as the experience of pure love.

Jayadeva immortalised this experience in his lyric poem the *Gita Govinda*. In the *Nayaka Nayaki Bhava* of the Alvars and in its northern versions, this *Matura Bhava* transcends sensuous love.

To the same illustrious line belong the mystics of Maharashtra, Namdev, Eknath, Tukaram and Ramdas. With Ramdas, religion become an ally of righteous political rule. He instilled courage in Shivaji to overcome his enemies and establish a peaceful and just rule.

Sikhism, the ethical religion founded by Guru Nanak, is a form of Vaishnavism which emphasised the virtue of *Acharya Abhiman* (devotion to the guru). The ten gurus represent divinity and the ten cardinal virtues of humility, obedience, equality, service, self-sacrifice, justice, compassion, purity, serenity and courage. Man belongs to God as much as He belongs to man. In this mutuality of kinship also Sikhism resembles the philosophy of Ramanuja. The fraternity of *Bhagavatas* (devotees) and the spiritual democracy found in the cult of Sikhism have much in common.

In modern times Mahatma Gandhi was a great example of the finest products of the teachings of the Vaishnava saints. The essence of what Ramanuja taught to his disciples on his death-bed is found in *Vaishnava Janato*, the famous song of Narsi Mehta popularised by Mahatma Gandhi.

Thus the movement initiated by Ramanuja has retained its vitality as seen in the various subsequent campaigns for ethical and social reforms. Vaishnavism, when preached, affirms and tries to sanctify this world and provides a complete answer to the superficial criticism that Hinduism is a world-denying religion.

XVI

IN PROPOUNDING the philosophy of *Visistadvaita*, Ramanuja's endeavour was to systematise the insights of the *Upanishads* so as to harmonise the idea of a personal God with the concept of the impersonal Absolute. God is One, characterized by attributes (*Visishta*). He is Isvàra. Non-sentient

Nature (*achit*) and sentient nature (*chit*) stand in adjectival relation to Him. Isvara manifests Himself in the two modes *Achit* and *Chit*. Knowledge consists in understanding these three entities, their individual nature and their relation to one another. They are the three truths of *Visistadvaita*, known as *tattva traya*.

The *Upanishadic* text reads *Brahmavid apnoti Param*, the Knower of Brahman attains the Highest (Tai-up-II-1). It is the threefold system of Vedantic wisdom, *tattva*, *hita* and *purushartha*. *Tattva* is the ultimate knowledge of Brahman as the permanent ground of all existence; *hita* is the moral and spiritual means of realizing Him, and *Purushartha* is the attainment of Brahman.

Isvara has no defects; He is the *sat* without a second. He possesses a divine body, full of splendour and tenderness, sweetness and poise. Ramanuja conceives of God as One whose nature had its fulfilment on *daya*. God in his infinite mercy enters into humanity for restoring wholeness to the alienated self. The hope of mankind rests on His *avatar* whose aim is to redeem the sinner. The endless perfections of God have no value or significance without *daya*.

Life dwells in the midst of non-life. An immaterial soul is in association with a material body and this is what we know as the universe. *Achit* and *chit* together have an existence, depending on His will. He is the soul centre, is permanent in the souls and in the physical universe. Matter and soul are equally real and eternal. They together constitute the body of God and He is the soul of all souls and matter. A mango has colour, taste, smell, flesh and fibre, each distinctive, but all constituting the fruit we know. The mango is one whole and the distinctive attributes (colour, taste, smell, etc.) have no separate existence apart from the fruit. God thus comprehends in Himself matter and the souls, the Reality is one without a second and He predominates over the attributive factors (matter and soul). He is the substantive factor. In a way, *Visistadvaita* is 'qualified non-dualism' and the non-dualism of the qualified whole.

The individual soul is different from *achit* and beyond it. But it dwells in a material body. So this association belongs to both realms of study, psychological and physical. The body lives, breathes, moves and it also thinks, feels and acts. In fact, in the manner it acts, it seeks to establish relationship with other sentient beings and non-sentient things. This is what we know as life in the world. A soul without a body is like a bird without wings and cannot take off. The soul attains perfection by its material existence. As the bird wings and sings, let us cry, 'All good things are ours, nor soul helps flesh more now than flesh helps soul!'

The soul's association with the body is necessary, but the two should not be confounded with each other. The soul transcends the body and if it rests content with its association with the body, it misses its higher destiny. Engrossed in material pursuits, it develops egotism, thinks it is a separate entity, independent of God, and goes after the pleasures of the senses.

The higher destiny for the soul is association with God. The soul in the body must ceaselessly strive for attaining Him. Limbs and organs are given to man to be dedicated to the service of God, which is to be rendered through service to fellow creatures. In this context, the body provides the means for reaching God. The body is thus the cause of bondage as well as of liberation. But the choice lies with man. He has the freedom to choose his own way of life and is morally responsible for what he does in this world.

The doctrine of Karma only emphasizes that the finite self is the maker of its own destiny. What a man sows he reaps. Karma affirms the freedom of the individual to sow what he chooses. But it does not follow that Karma is all-powerful and operates eternally and can over-ride the law of justice, if man could only seek salvation by surrender, giving up his incessant urge to evil. The Lord is the Saviour and if man knowing and choosing his own freedom chooses the path of absolute self-surrender to Him, he can attain *mukti*.

Man passes various physical stages, childhood, youth, middle age and old age. Each stage has its own appropriate duties and special dangers and through them all finds comfort and security in the thought of the Lord who supports *dharma* and promises freedom. Man longs for freedom both in and from action and that perpetual ever-meaningful freedom is *Moksha*. Man's eternal saviour and final refuge is God and He ever waits to answer every prayer, if only man would recognise his Master and turn to Him.

Ramanuja tells a story to illustrate this. A young prince leaves the palace and gets lost. A brahmin, who sees the prince, takes him to his house and brings him up in poverty and simplicity. When the boy reaches sixteen, somebody tells him that his father is the ruler of the country and endowed with wealth and power. The boy, happy to receive this information, goes to his father, is received and welcomed by him. The father and son are reunited.

The prince, the aberrated soul, is promised by the good brahmin and guided by the guru to recognise and reach again the Lord from whom he had for a while parted in thought.

While the body changes and perishes and knows birth and death, the soul is eternal. Birth means association of the body with the soul and death means separation.

Man is a knower, a doer and an enjoyer. He has a consciousness that expresses itself in and through these activities. Man has the option to do good or evil. God has given him the choice. The road to perfection is difficult only because man has to learn how to use his freedom.

The struggles in life lead a man to realise that his freedom consists in making his will conform to God's, for everything is dependent on Him. All things obey him who obeys God. Like a tree that gives shade and fruit to others, he should know how and be content to live for others.

The eight-syllabled mantra, 'OM NAMO NARAYANA', which is taught and explained to one after initiation, is a constant reminder to the Vaishnava that he should live for God and not for himself. And God includes everything in the Universe from Suryanarayana, to bow to and worship, Daridranarayana to work for and serve.

There are three kinds of individual souls, those that are in bondage, those that have been liberated and those that are eternally free. Those that are in bondage have the inherent capacity to liberate themselves, but they are not aware of it. This ignorance causes confusion; the soul is mistaken for the body. Oil is latent in the sesamum seed and heat in the log of wood. The oil has to be crushed out of the seed, the wood has to be ignited to assist generation of heat. So also the soul needs spiritual endeavour to realise its capacity. *jnana* leads one to such realisation. But a higher stage is reached when *jnana* ripens into *bhakti*. *Bhakti* is the logic of the heart, and in its highest state of feeling, it exists for its own sake. Ramanuja derived the inspiration for his philosophy of *bhakti* from the experience and songs of the Alvars of the South. His greatness lies in integrating the emotion of *bhakti*, the insights of these singer-saints with the metaphysics of Vedanta by methods of argumentation that came to him from his profound scholarship in Sanskrit.

There are many ways of worshipping God, the simplest and most effective being *prapatti*. It is unqualified self-surrender to God. Leaving the burden of salvation to Him, the *prapanna* lives a life of tranquillity and peace. His vocation in this world is service to His creatures, and the service seeks no reward for it is worship of Him. *Ahimsa*, self-restraint, compassion, forgiveness, peace, simplicity, knowledge and truthfulness are the eight 'flowers' which are dear to Him.

'*Kainkarya*' or service to His devotees is the end of life. *Moksha* consists in such service. God lives in us and in other *jivas* and to live for others is the highest bliss of life. If He lives in us, we must make this body and soul worthy of Him. Living for God is the driving force of our life. To this end only are we born. Earth is a better place than heaven if only we know how to live with Him here and now. Ramanuja used often to quote the hymn of Tondaradipodi Alvar which says for a true *bhakta* who had learnt to live with 'God in apparent slumber' (Narayana) on this very earth, Heaven holds no charm. Tirupati is in no way inferior to 'Vaikuntam' (the abode of Lord Vishnu). Ramanuja has written three prose-poems to drive home this point. They are *Saranagati Gadya*, *Sriranga Gadya* and *Vaikunta Gadya*.

Prakriti is the substratum of three *gunas*, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Prakriti* constitutes His body and mode. The universe is from *Prakriti* and controlled by His will. The relation between matter and form is known as *aprithak siddhi* (inseparable relation). Ramanuja speaks of the relation of Brahman to the *achit* and *chit* in terms of *Sarira-sariri bhava* (the body-soul concept), *Visesana-visesya bhava* (the substance-attribute concept), *Sesa-sesi-bhava* (the dependent servant and dominant master concept), *Amsa-amsi bhava* (the part-whole concept) and *adharadheya bhava* (the concept of the sustainer and the sustained), *niyanta niyamya bhava* (the ruler and ruled relation) and *raksaha raksya bhava* (the protector and protege concept).

Sarira is the substance which the *chit* is able to control for its own purpose. It is different from *chit* because of its transitory nature. *Achit* is devoid of consciousness and *chit* has consciousness and is independent of *achit*. *Chit* and *achit* constitute the body of God (Isvara) and they are controlled by Him for His own purpose. God alone exists and the sentient and non-sentient things stand in adjectival relation to Him. This is *visesana-visesya bhava* or *prakara prakari bhava*. The totality of things has its self in Brahman, as it constitutes Brahman's body. The relation of Brahman to souls and matter is compared by Ramanuja to a three-coloured piece of cloth. The material cause is like a thread of different colours, white, red, black, etc. But at a definite spot, each is connected by a single colour, say, white. Here there is no confusion of loss of identity or characteristics. The Lord is the material cause of the world and the sentient and non-sentient things, the different threads, are capable of existing apart from one another.

God manifests Himself in five ways (1) *para* (2) *vyuha* (3) *vibhava* (4) *antaryamin* (5) *archavatars*. *Para* is the highest state in which, as Parabrahman or Narayana, He dwells in the domain of *nitya-vibuthi*. The second form of manifestation is known as *vyuha* which is fourfold; Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha forms assured for the purpose of worship by the devotees. The third is *vibhava* in which the Supreme manifests Himself as *avataras*. The fourth manifestation is *antaryamin*, as dweller in the heart of all embodied beings. The last is *archa* in which the deity is present in consecrated images.

The *sesa-sesi bhava* speaks of God as the owner and master and the individual soul as the slave or servant. We are wholly dependent upon God, though for a while we foolishly forget it.

Brahman is the whole and the individual soul is the part. Brahman is the light and the world of men and things is His luminosity.

Brahman is the ground on which everything rests. This is the *adhara-adheya* relation. The non-intelligent matter in its subtle state is known as *Prakriti*; God connects the embryo with this and thus originates the universe.

The cosmos exists in Brahman and emanates from Him. He exists in it as its inner self and governs Nature and individual souls. This shows Brahman as *Niyanta* (controller).

God is *rakshaka* and the individual soul is *rakshya*. God is the saviour of souls. He has His qualitative *saulabhya* (accessibility) and *sausilya* (graciousness). God enters humanity out of mercy, suffers with man, and raises him to a higher level by His example and guidance.

Ramanuja expounds the theory of *dharmabhutajnana* or consciousness as an attribute which is distinct from substantive consciousness. This helps avoid defects of realism and idealism. Realism is knowledge of external things and their relations. Idealism regards everything as thought-born. Realism leaves a gap between thought and things, whereas idealism is merely subjective. *Dharmabhutajnana* establishes the reality of the subject-object, *chit-achit* relation. *Chit* and *achit* are both in the Absolute; they exist eternally and are not external to Brahman. *Dharmabhutajnana* is knowledge of things as they are in reality; it is self-luminous; it can reveal the Absolute. *Dharmabhutajnana*, subject to limitations by Karma, can go beyond the barriers imposed on it and in its purified state it becomes a vehicle for bringing about an immediate intuition of the Absolute. Finite knowledge thus expands into infinite consciousness which is necessary to realise God who is beyond all finite categories.

There can never be a knowledge of an unqualified bare object according to Ramanuja. He never admitted an attributeless or non-differentiated Brahman. Even the negative statements of the *Upanisads* '*neti, neti*' (not this, not this) have a positive import, for they negate only certain attributes.

Knowledge, according to Ramanuja, is the comprehension of reality. Error is only incomplete knowledge. When a *fire-brand* is rotated, it appears to describe a circle. It touches all the points during its course, but we are unable to apprehend the intervals. In *samsara*, knowledge only reveals partial truth and, in an expanded state, it reveals reality. Ramanuja accepts only this valid means of knowing, perception (*pratyaksha*), inference (*anumana*) and verbal testimony (*sabda*).

The ethical side of Vaishanavism emphasises absolute self-surrender to God and its mystical aspect presents God as the personification of love and *bhakti*, as longing for communion with Him. The destiny of the 'self' is God. Stranded in the world of *samsara*, it suffers from a sense of alienation. Spiritually awakened, it will be satisfied with nothing more and nothing less than communion. Separation becomes an intolerable burden and the futility of the body in a space-time setting is realised. The self is caught in ecstasy and the Lord enters the soul of the mystic, once it has been cleansed of all else. This sums up the mystical experiences of the *bhakta*. *Mukti* is not only a realisation of Brahman but attainment of the *paramapada*. This experience goes beyond the logic of the space-time values. The integration of the *jiva* with God causes loss of the separatist outlook of world by people and sharpens the thirst for helping humanity as a whole. Thus the mystic experience of a Vaishnavite is of a positive nature.

Ramanuja conceives God as the Eternally Beautiful. Though He is beyond *prakriti* (matter) and its attributes, in order to attract the Self He appears in the cosmos in a form of infinite beauty. The universe is invested with this divine charm, for the Lord delights to sport with His creatures in the space-time world which is the field of His *lila*. This is the substance of Ramanuja's aesthetic conception of Brahman.

Visistadvaita is a philosophy of religious conduct and religious experience. It is not a mere theoretical speculation but a faith tested by reason and practice and transcending both in its intuitions of divine grace. It offers salvation to all irrespective of caste, creed or colour. By presenting eternal goodness and beauty as the goal of the finite self and providing a path which is clear, attractive and world-sanctifying, it makes human life meaningful and worthwhile.

The emotional and metaphysical basis for the practice of dharma which Vaishnavism offers is summed up in the concept of Rama-*rajya*, the rule of righteousness on earth.

EXTRACTS FROM RAMANUJA'S WORKS

1. 'Then therefore the enquiry concerning the Brahman. By the word Brahman is denoted the Highest Person who is by nature devoid of all evils, and is possessed of hosts of auspicious qualities, which are innumerable and unsurpassed in excellence'.
2. '*Jijnasa* is (literally) the desire to know. As (every) desire has for its basis the thing to be desired, here that very knowledge of the thing desired (Brahman) is enjoined. 'Hearing' (*sravana*), 'reflection' (*manana*) and 'steady meditation' (*nididhyasana*) are useful for the purpose of knowing the meaning of (scriptural) sentences.'
3. '*Dhyana* (meditation) is of the form of a succession of memories (or remembrances) which is unbroken like a stream of oil. Memory has the character of direct perceptions, because it is (simply) an identification (of the process of mental conception)'.
4. 'Unreality is that which, being grounded upon what is perceived, is liable to be stultified by means of the knowledge of things as they actually are; as for instance, it can be made out in the case of the (falsely perceived) serpent, etc., having for their foundation a (real) rope, etc. The assumption of the existence of that (serpent) there (*i.e.*, in the rope) is due to something wrong that misguides us all in this world which is made up of the distinction of gods, animals, men, immovable things and is assumed to exist in the Highest Brahman whose

essence is pure intelligence and is liable to be injuriously affected by the knowledge of the true nature of Brahman and has, therefore, the character of unreality. Those who maintain the view that there is a thing which is devoid of attributes cannot say what criterion there is to prove that the thing exists which is so devoid of attributes; because all the criteria, such as truth, deal (only) with such objects as possess attributes. And the convention thus obtained in their own school that it (*viz.*, the thing devoid of attributes) is established by one's own experience is counteracted by the fact of such experience having (nevertheless) the qualification of being witnessed by the *atman* (or the self) because, all experiences relate to objects which are qualified by some attributes or other, as for instance, in the specific cognition 'I saw this'. If it has to be demonstrated by some specious reasoning other than an experience, while it is being experienced while it is without attributes although it is (in fact) possessed of attributes, it can be so demonstrated only with the help of such natural qualifying attributes as are peculiar to that (experience) itself and are different from its own existence. Therefore, even though it continues to be qualified by means of its own qualifying attributes, which form the basis of such demonstration and which are different from its own existence and are peculiar to itself under these circumstances, it is only some attributes that are denied in relation to a thing which is (already) qualified by other attributes; thus the thing which is devoid of attributes can in no way be proved.'

5. 'A crystal gem lying close to a China rose is apprehended to be red, because it is overpowered by the brilliant

coloration of that (China rose). Although the brilliance of the China rose radiates in all directions, it is apprehended with great clearness only when it is associated with a transparent substance.'

6. 'The perception of one's own face in the mirror and in other such things is also based upon reality. The rays proceeding from the eye are stopped and reflected in their movement by the mirror and other such things and then are apprehended one's own face and other similar objects. In this case alone on account of the rapidity of movement (of the ocular aura) there is no apprehension of the outer space (between the mirror and the image) and consequently there is such a perception. So also in regard to the illusion relating to direction in space, since any other region and space may be actually formed to exist in this (region and space), the other region of space is, through the influence of some unseen agency, apprehended as if associated with this region of space. Therefore the apprehension of one region of space as another is also based on reality itself.'

7. 'We know from scripture that there is a Supreme person whose nature is absolute bliss and goodness; who is fundamentally antagonistic to all evil; who is the cause of the origination, sustenation and dissolution of the world; who differs in nature from all other beings; who is all-knowing, who by His mere thought and will accomplishes all His purposes : who is an ocean of kindness as it were for all who depend on Him : who is all-merciful.'

8. 'Surrender yourself to Him. Your soul will blossom under the influence of His grace. He is the God of gods

and your loving Lord. Your affection for Him will bring to you the clear vision of His Presence. Contemplation of this experience will give you tranquillity.

9. 'When will I see with my eyes my Lord, who is my wealth, my father, mother and all? When will I touch with these hands of mine those tender, beautiful lotus-like feet of my Lord? When will I merge into them with all my being? When will I merge with that ocean of immortality'?

10. 'The exalted qualities of the soul, freedom from evil and so on which manifest themselves in the state of Release no doubt belong to it essential nature: but that the soul is of such a nature fundamentally depends on the Supreme person and on Him also depends the permanency of these qualities; they are permanent in so far as the Lord Himself on whom they are dependent is permanent. It thus appears that the equality with the Lord which the released souls may claim does not extend to the world-ruling energies.'

11. 'Were it a settled matter that release consists in the annihilation of the I, man would move away as soon as release is even hinted at. He would ask what value such a release would have for him when he himself would perish. No sensible person exerts himself under the influence of the idea that after he himself has perished there will remain some entity termed pure light.'

12. '*Upasana* has the character of devout meditation and consists in direct intuition of Brahman.'

13. When a man reaches knowledge, the non-clinging and destruction of all sins may be through the power of knowledge.'

coloration of that (China rose). Although the brilliance of the China rose radiates in all directions, it is apprehended with great clearness only when it is associated with a transparent substance.'

6. 'The perception of one's own face in the mirror and in other such things is also based upon reality. The rays proceeding from the eye are stopped and reflected in their movement by the mirror and other such things and then are apprehended one's own face and other similar objects. In this case alone on account of the rapidity of movement (of the ocular aura) there is no apprehension of the outer space (between the mirror and the image) and consequently there is such a perception. So also in regard to the illusion relating to direction in space, since any other region and space may be actually formed to exist in this (region and space), the other region of space is, through the influence of some unseen agency, apprehended as if associated with this region of space. Therefore the apprehension of one region of space as another is also based on reality itself.'

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13. When a man reaches knowledge, the non-clinging and destruction of all sins may be through the power of knowledge.'

14. 'Be it the divine, the human, the animal or the stationary Kingdom, be they high or low in point of kind or caste, in point of look (colour, etc.), in point of nature (character, etc) or in point of enlightenment, as the refuge of all, independent of such distinctions, I am equal. Inferiority as regards kind (caste), look, nature or understanding in any person does not in itself imply that he is not dear to me or is fit to be rejected as unworthy or cannot come to Me as his refuge. No one on the other hand claiming superiority of caste, etc, is because of it specially entitled to claim Me as his refuge or has reason to be particularly dear to me.'

15. 'May knowledge transformed into intense love directed to Srinivasa, the highest Brahman, become mine, the Being to whom the creation, preservation and dissolution of the universe is mere play, whose main resolve is to offer protection to all those who approach Him in humility and sincerity and who shines like a beacon light out of the pages of the scripture.'

16. 'If perception made us apprehend only pure being, judgement, clearly referring to different objects such as 'here is a jar', 'there is a piece of cloth', would be devoid of all meaning. And if through perception we did not apprehend difference—as marked by the generic character, etc., constituting the structure or form of a thing—why should a man searching for a horse not be satisfied with finding a buffalo?'

17. 'Perception then having for its object only that which is marked by difference, inference also is in the same category, for its object is only what is distingushed by its connection with things known through perception and other means of knowledge. Thus even in the

case of disagreement as to the number of different instruments of knowledge, a thing devoid of difference could be established by any one of them since the instruments of knowledge acknowledged by all have only one and the same object, *viz.*, what is marked by difference.'

18. 'Brahman, being raised above all contact with the senses, is not an object of perception and the other means of proof, but to be known through scripture only.'

19. 'It is with a view to such confirmation of the sense of scripture by means of reasoning that the texts declare that certain topics such as the self must be reflected upon'.

20. 'The essential nature of consciousness or knowledge is that it shines forth or manifests itself through its own being to its own substrata at the present moment or (to give another definition) that it is instrumental in proving its own object by its own being.'

21. 'The essential character of consciousness or knowledge is that by its very existence it renders things capable of becoming objects, to its own substrata, of thought and speech. This consciousness (*anubhuti*) which is also termed *jnana* is a particular attribute belonging to the conscious self and relates to an object. As such it is known to everyone as the testimony of his own self as appears from ordinary judgements such as "I know the jar", "I understand this matter", "I can perceive (the presence) this piece of cloth."'

22. 'Let us imagine a race of men afflicted with a certain special defect of vision, without being aware of an object, dwelling in some remote mountain caves inaccessible to all other men provided with normal eyes.

it wishes to act. Just as a carpenter although having his axe and other instruments ready at hand works or does not work as he pleases.'

33. 'The *bhakta's* only happiness consists in being with God and his misery in being without God. Secondly, the *bhakta* attributes all his afflictions to his own guilt. Thirdly, the *bhakta* has implicit faith that all beings subject are to God's sovereign rule.'

34. I bow unto Vishnu who has as his body all the sentient and non-sentient beings, who is the self of all objects, who is associated with Sri and who is the ocean of bliss untainted by impurity.

35. Then, therefore, the enquiry into Brahman.

Here the word, 'then' is used in the sense of coming thereafter; because it is followed by the word therefore. The word 'therefore' is used in the sense of causation of that which has been concluded previously. What has been concluded previously, is understood to be the knowledge of ritualistic works because the enquiry into Brahman which is desired to be commenced here, happens to be a portion of the enquiry into the meaning of the *Vedas*. Indeed, for the person who has completed his study of the *Vedas* the first duty is to make an inquiry into the ritualistic works, as the *Vedas* commence to deal with them in the beginning. Hence, it is stated, "Then, therefore, the inquiry into the *Dharma*," (*Mim* 1.1.1). Taking the topic *Dharma* separately, it is determined in the terms of the *sutras* ending with "The priestly functions must be common for all the castes as all are able to do them," (*Mim.* 12-4-40), that the rituals of *Prakriti* and *Vikriti* kinds are only the means to attain the three-fold object of human pursuit, *Dharma* (ritualistic works), *Artha* (wealth) and *Kama* (gratification of desire).'

36. 'It should not be doubted that the Anandamaya who is the cause of the world, omniscient and blissful, is understood to be an individual self endowed with extraordinary merits, and not the Supreme Self, because He is said to have a body. It refers to the Supreme Person and the Highest Self, *i.e.*, denoted by the word, Person, occurring in the scriptural statement in "The Person who is seen within the sun. He is brilliant like gold" (*Chand*, 1.6.6) Why? Because His attributes are declared in the context. The attributes of the Highest Person, who is other than the individual self, are His unlimited Lordship over all the world and all the desires. It is not being under the influence of Karma. The scriptural authorities declare: "He is the Lord of all the worlds and also of all desires." "His name is High." This same person is risen above all sins.'

37. 'Homage to the Principal to whom all spiritual and nonspiritual entities are accessory. Who reposes on Sesha and who is the treasury of immaculate and infinite beautiful qualities: *Vishnu.*'

38. 'May the sage Yamuna prosper. He has dispelled the bewildering obscurity of ignorance which, albeit contrary to revelation and reason, has spread all over the world; such errors as the view that the Supreme Brahman, being nescient and afflicted with misconceptions, is implicated in samsara. Or that the Supreme Brahman is liable to adventitious limiting adjuncts that are different from itself and as such is subject to Karma. Or that the Supreme Brahman itself is the abode of imperfection.'

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Ramanuja, the great saint, teacher and founder of the philosophical school known as Vishishtadvaita, was born in A.D. 1017 at Sriperumbudur near Madras. He laid the spiritual foundation of the new Vaishnavite school with its stress on Bhakti and was thus the precursor of other Hindu reformers like Vallabha, Eknath, Ramadas, Tukaram, Jayadeva and Chaitanya. The Bhakti School became the most vital force in the new resurgence of Hinduism.

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